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ASMUS SEMPER

ASMUS SEMPER

THE STORY OF A BOYHOOD

BY

OTTO ERNST

TRANSLATED BY ALETHEIA CATON

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FRANCIS GRIFFITHS

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Through closed doors there steals a sound of music,
Played by gentle hands—so low and tender
That, in doubt, I question:—Is it Nature
Breathing deep-felt silence, or sweet music?
Or sweet music?

Was that sound like life that long since perished?
Aye!—it called like days of early childhood,
Like a faint far call of old forefathers
Still unsleeping in graves long forgotten,
In graves long forgotten.

And the breath of mine own life, hereafter
Shall enfold the children of my children,
Like dream-music, played by gentle fingers,
Echoing faintly through the fast-closed shutters,
Through the fast-closed shutters.

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ASMUS SEMPER



BOOK I

CHAPTER I

TREATS OF ASMUS'S INTERCOURSE WITH BARBERS'
BASINS, BRICKLAYERS, DAINTY LITTLE WOMEN,
BARREL-ORGANS, ROCKETS, AND MORE ESPECIALLY
WITH HIS FATHER.

WHEN Asmus endeavoured to recall the various events connected with his childhood, the very earliest picture that presented itself to his mind was of himself, a tiny tot in a little white frock, sitting on a landing, while his mother leant over the banisters chatting with a neighbour. He could remember nothing whatever that took place before that; it was his very first reminiscence—not a very noteworthy one, it is true, but for Asmus it had a certain importance. That particular moment was surrounded for all time with the silvery, translucent haze of early days, like the light seen through falling rain when the sun breaks out suddenly through the clouds. It was the day-dawn of his soul.

The next great event that had made a lasting

impression on his memory was connected with a barber's basin. The basin hung over a door in a street. When the wind set it in motion it sparkled beautifully, and Asmus was quite convinced that it was the loveliest thing in the world. One day his father, Ludwig Semper, went into the house of the beautiful basin carrying his son Asmus. A man, who never stopped talking, put his hand on Asmus's head, and then brushed white lather over his father's face. While the man was talking, his father looked at him quite quietly with his big eyes, and said: "H'm!". Then the man took hold of his father's nose and scraped the lather off. And when his father was outside again with his Asmus they went into a great public square. It was very beautiful, because it was so big and airy. Several men were standing about in clean coats, and his father spoke to them. The men in the clean coats were very beautiful, in fact that day the whole world was beautiful, because it was Sunday everywhere.

After that, there was a great gap between Asmus's recollections, and then he saw himself sitting on a wheel-barrow, which his brother Alfred was pushing. And at the end of the ride Asmus found himself in a different house. The family had moved.

In this house it was quite splendid, for opposite it men appeared and set to work to dig a great square hole. Carts, with real live horses in front of them, came and took away the earth they had dug out. The horses scraped the ground with their hoofs, bit each other's necks, and then shook their heads so that the whole of their harness rattled. It was then that Asmus made up his mind that as soon as he was big he would be a carter. To sit high up in a cart and to whip the horses all day must be the

most beautiful thing in the world, he thought. But things got better still. Carts came up full of red stones; they were such a pretty red, and the stones were piled up one on the top of the other. Oh, what a lot of stones there were! There must have been a thousand of them, or perhaps even a hundred! But it got better and better! One day a man came and threw white stones into a hole, then he poured cold water over them, and it all began to boil! Little Asmus was so anxious to get a good view that he almost forced the window-pane out with his little nose. And didn't he open his eyes wide—as wide as ever they would go. And then what do you think happened? He chanced to look at the man who was making the stones boil, and saw that he was staring at him too, and then the man actually laughed and nodded at him. Asmus felt shy, and ran away from the window. But then, when one of those spring days came which make you feel equal to anything, he ventured out, and went up closer and closer to the building, and when the stone-boiler put his finger in his mouth and made a sound like a big cork popping out of a bottle, they became fast friends at once. Asmus said, "Uncle Stoneman," and the bricklayer said, "Master." The bricklayer would ask: "Now then, master, where would you like me to put a stone now?" and then Asmus would say, "There"; and Asmus only went home to the principal meals. "Now we're building the sitting-room!" he would call out as he came in at the door.

It is both fortunate and unfortunate that houses get finished. For the builder and architect Asmus Semper it was very unfortunate. The day came when a gloomy-looking stone erection stood where

there used to be an open airy space and radiant light, and the friend who used to perform the cork trick a hundred times a day had disappeared, and never came back. Though little Asmus's heart was not a very big one as yet, he felt the man's faithlessness keenly.

But to tell the truth it was only retribution for his own faithlessness.

For the sake of the bricklayer he had forsaken his old love in a very despicable way. This old love of his was a little widow, old and dainty, with a fascinating coffee-pot with blue flowers on it, which was always steaming on the table, and was made of porcelain, like its owner. There was also a delicate, soothing aroma of aniseed cake diffused through the whole of the little flat, and this was the real spell that drew back little Asmus's heart into the old lady's magic circle. But when he tried to renew the old relations, and entered the room in the cheeriest manner imaginable, he did not meet with a very gracious reception. The little old woman had really been jealous, and she scolded him well for not having been near her for such a long time. He need not trouble himself to come again, she said. But Asmus was not the kind of person to brook an insult; he broke out into a fearful howl, and screamed:—

"I want to go ho—me! I want to go ho—me!" Then the little widow, in a great fright, fetched two little aniseed cakes as quickly as she could, and put one into each of his little hands. That Asmus considered to be ample satisfaction. He took a bite, then ate up the cakes, together with the tears that fell on them.

This neighbour lived to the left of them, and there was another to match on the right, the wife of a bricklayer, a tall, robust woman with a face like a man's,

about whom it was narrated, as a fact of which there was not the least doubt, that she chewed tobacco. This woman Asmus could not endure; he always felt an irresistible inclination to stare at the cheek in which the tobacco was tucked away. And then one day when he had recited *Der Postiljong von Longschümoh* quite correctly and very distinctly, the woman had said to his mother: "Frau Semper, that child's much too cute for his age, and that isn't a good thing; you must whip him more." Asmus happened to hear that, and did not agree with her, and of course this hygienic advice did not increase his affection for the brick-layer's wife. One day, however, she took him into her kitchen and presented him with a big apple, and then he scampered off to his mother, crying out: "Mamma, Frau Rheder is a *sweet* woman, she's given me an apple!" •

Besides these people and occurrences, there was only one other event that took place during this period that his memory had retained, and that was his father Ludwig Semper's fall into a cellar through a trap-door which had been left open in a dark forecourt. His father had escaped with a slight concussion of the ribs, but to little Asmus it seemed a great and incomprehensible piece of ill-luck, and it made him feel very sad when he saw his father suffering. He could not understand how any one, a human being or a trap-door, could hurt his father. For to him his father was just like the good kind God of whom he had seen a picture. The same broad forehead, the same beautiful, thick grey hair (he was grey by the time he was thirty-three, his mother said), the same big, handsome nose, the same long beard that did not hide his mouth—that mouth from which had come nearly all the delightful, beautiful things that Asmus had any know-

ledge of. From the mouth, and the great eyes they had come. When the eyes laughed, rays went out from them in every direction, as they do from candles on a Christmas tree. When Asmus wanted to stay out of doors an hour longer, his mother would say: "Ask your father," and his father would look up from the table at which he was making cigars and would gaze at him quietly. Then his father's face would get brighter and brighter, and then the rays would come out of his eyes, and then the kind mouth would be drawn a little to one side, and then Asmus knew: "Now he is going to say 'All right';" and that's just what he did say. Then little Asmus would jump up like a spring that has been released from a catch, and would shout out, "Father says all wight!" and he was out of doors. Then his mother would probably say (Asmus knew that even then): "You always let that boy have his own way." His father would make no reply, but would look out at his son Asmus jumping and skipping about, and would laugh quietly to himself so that his broad shoulders shook. Asmus knew that too. And for such a father a treacherous cellar door could dare to lie in wait!

After this accident Asmus's mind is asleep for some considerable time. This long spell of oblivion is interrupted only by the sounds of a fair, that he hears one day in the distance—sounds of drums, trumpets, whistles, and barrel-organs, and by a rocket shooting up one evening in the eastern sky over the "Schützenhof."

CHAPTER II

TREATS OF "SHORT-LIVED MISERY" AND "LONG-LIVED WRETCHEDNESS," OF SCHNEDE'S DONKEY AND OF DIEPENBROCK'S MOON, AND MORE PARTICULARLY OF THE SEMPERS' RECKLESSNESS AND EXTRAVAGANCE.

AND the next thing he can recollect is the little, oblong village pond and the quacking and cackling of ducks and geese. He can remember, too, how he used to lie in the grass, and when he opened his eyes could see between the trunks of the seven trees on its brink three wretched little houses, each of which would have toppled over had it not been held up by its neighbour. The village people used to call those three little houses "Kurze Elend" (Short-lived Misery), because the row of eight or ten houses which stood at right angles to them was known by the name of the "Lange Jammer" (Long-lived Wretchedness).

The words "Kurze Elend" must not be taken too literally. The seven members of the Semper family—subsequently increased to eight—generally had meat for dinner—a whole half pound of meat; when the father was in full work, that is to say. When he was out of work they would begin—when they were still hopeful—by having dumplings and plums, then they would come down to coffee and bread; first to coffee and bread for which they paid ready money, and then to coffee and bread procured on trust. When

both the credit and the dripping had almost come to an end, the mother, who had a genius for making the best of things, would put some potato peelings on to the dry bread—a clear case of driving out the devil by Beelzebub. That kind of thing went on through the whole of Asmus's childhood. So that neither the word "misery" nor the word "short" was quite applicable to the Sempers.

With regard to the potatoes, they were bought at Mr. Schnede's, who lived quite far away, on the other side of the village pond, which was fifty feet wide. Little Asmus could never think of this Mr. Schnede without feeling that he had a grudge against him. Once, when he had burnt his mouth with a potato at dinner, and had complained that the potatoes were always so hot, his mother had said: "Oh, that's because they're Schnede's potatoes, they're always so hot." From that day Asmus always looked askance at Mr. Schnede's old, tumble-down, thatched house.

However, the donkey brought about a reconciliation between little Semper and Mr. Schnede, the donkey that every morning used to draw his master's cart with the green stuff in it through the village, or rather, to be quite correct, was supposed to draw it, for this donkey came to a halt as soon as it had taken three steps, and after that, as is the case with every donkey possessed of a mind, it was no easy matter to induce him to move on again. Behaviour of this kind makes a donkey very interesting to children who are looking on, and what made it still more delightful was that Mr. Schnede called out the whole time: "Potatoes, ho! Broad beans, ho! Cabbage, white cabbage, ho!!!" He was a visionary was Mr. Schnede. He dragged the donkey along as well as the cart, and it is not surprising that he was the father of an artist who

subsequently made the name of his native village renowned.

Moreover, Asmus loved with his whole heart Mr. Diepenbrock and his moon. Asmus had noticed, over and over again, that the moon rose over Mr. Diepenbrock's house, and when one summer evening, as he was walking along by the pond holding his father's hand, he asked: "That's Diepenbrock's moon, isn't it?" his father said: "Yes, that is Diepenbrock's moon," and his broad shoulders shook convulsively. He was a very good man.

But a reckless, extravagant man too, there is no denying that. Every week a man used to come to the village with a shade over his eyes, and a barrel-organ upon which year after year he would play the same wearisome old tune:—

"You have never l-o-o-o-o-o-ved me,
 "That has grieved m-e-e-e-e greatly."

And nearly every time Ludwig Semper would give him a farthing, even when bread and coffee was the order of the day. Most likely the organ-grinder was not nearly so blind as he pretended to be, but that made no difference to the reckless Ludwig Semper.

And if that had only been all! Not a bit of it. On Saturday evenings, when Ludwig Semper had taken his cigars to the cross-grained manufacturer, and had received some money, he would buy half a pound of cheese and four pennyworth of rum. The Semper children always had some of the cheese, and so it never dawned upon them what a reckless, extravagant father they had.

In the evening Ludwig Semper would make a stronger glass of grog for himself, and a weaker one for the Mother, and then he would sit down opposite her and would sink into thought, and then smile, or

clench his teeth viciously, or throw up his head, while his eyes would shine and he would not say a word.

Silence was a favourite occupation of the Sempers. From time to time they would put up a notice-board with the inscription "Not at Home" in front of the entrance to their soul. And then they would retire for days, for weeks, to the innermost recess in their soul, would dwell alone there with their most sacred treasures, and to their fellows would speak only with their lips. Then, when soothed and refreshed, they returned to the outside world again they would be as cheerful and communicative as young birds. Carsten Semper, Asmus's grandfather, had loved to be alone with his seventeen pictures of Napoleon, and to dream silently with the dumb hero—who concealed his breast with his crossed arms, as with clamps of brass—of Lodi, of Austerlitz, and of the Pyramids. His son, Ludwig Semper, had a more extended circle of friends dwelling in the recesses of his heart.

Carsten, who was a small shopkeeper in Schleswig, had wished his son to be a parson, and had sent him to the Grammar School. On Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings it was customary for the notables of the town to meet at Mr. Semper's place of business. They used to eat excellent rye bread and pink-and-white ham, drink as much Bommerlunder and Lütjenburger as they wanted, and pay absurdly little for it—nothing at all if the truth must be told. For this reason perhaps, and also, perhaps, because an infatuation for Napoleon and the selling of matches is not a good combination, Carsten Semper's money, and his business too, came to an end before Ludwig Semper had finished with the Grammar School. Ludwig Semper, therefore, had to go out into the world to

find a way of earning enough to buy food with, and to have a little over if possible to send to his parents. He found work with a wine-bottler, and learnt from him how to clarify and retail wines. But the good wine-bottler could barely make enough out of his wines to feed himself, and was very soon obliged to dismiss his assistant. Struggling and persevering did not happen to be what Ludwig Semper was made for. He came across a jovial fellow who said to him: "Come with me, and learn to make cigars; it won't take you long to learn, you'll find plenty o' work here, you can make a livin' and can think as much as you like while you are workin'." Ludwig Semper thought: "All right, that will do for the present; to-morrow or the day after I shall find something better." But it was always "to-morrow" or the "day after," till he died. Then he did find something better.

This brilliant career had only one interruption. In the year 1848 Ludwig Semper had to fight for the liberation of Schleswig - Holstein. He fought at Kolding and Idstedt, and in 1850 returned to his cigar bench. He had married, of course, just before the war broke out. For, as a new Tacitus informs us, "The Germans marry very young." Young Mrs. Semper had never heard of Virgil and Xenophon, and she would have been quite capable of asking where they lived and what their trade was; but she was a capital nurse. When Ludwig Semper had met with an accident and had been taken to Kiel, she had nursed him, and it is possible that he said to himself that with a good nurse you could never be very badly off. But it is not at all certain that he did say it, for where his heart was concerned it was not Ludwig Semper's way to think of the pros and cons, but to act on the spur of the moment. Thus it came about that when

the war began the arrival of a little Semper was expected.

And when the father had to take up his rifle and shako, the bright, active mother of twenty did not waste any time pondering over what she should do, but took up nursing again. A week after the birth of her little girl she was doing needlework all day and on duty at the children's hospital at night. And she proved herself so reliable that the doctors always gave her the most difficult cases.

If Ludwig Semper had been an energetic man he would no doubt have found an opportunity after the war to clamber up into a higher social sphere; but as no one came to him to offer him anything, and as another young Schleswig-Holsteiner had arrived upon the scene, he was only too pleased to make cigars and to think his thoughts. Ludwig Semper and his wife Rebekka were thorough Germans, and in the course of the years they had several children, and to about the ninth or tenth they gave the name of Asmus.

CHAPTER III

TELLS HOW THE HOUSE WAS FILLED WITH THE ODOUR
OF GRUEL, HOW THE WHITE SOLDIERS CAME,
AND HOW ASMUS PRESCRIBED IN HIS BROTHER
LEONHARD'S TOP-HAT.

THEY were still living in the "Kurze Elend" when Asmus noticed one morning, to his great astonishment, that instead of his mother his father took him on his knees and put on his little boots. There was an odour of gruel, too, all over the house. It was not long before his father told him he had another little brother. From that time, whenever there was an odour of gruel in the house, Asmus thought: "Hello! Where is mother?" asked Asmus. "Mother is in bed." "Why?" "The stork has bitten her leg." Asmus was silent for a moment. Then he said: "When the stork brings us another brother, tell him he's not to bite mother's leg." Ludwig made no reply. He was cogitating as to how he was to get the money together to pay the nurse and the doctor. "May I see my little brother?" asked Asmus. He was taken into the wonderful room. His mother smiled at him more lovingly even than usual, because it would be a whole week before she would be able to do anything for him, and then she raised the coverlet and showed him a warm little doll that made the funniest grinfaces.

"Oh, he has fingers!" exclaimed Asmus rapturously.

All this happened about the time when a most beautiful jingle-jangle came from the place where the sun always stood in the middle of the day. Almost before it had time to reach the Sempers' house Asmus was standing in front of the door—for he obeyed the call of a beautiful sound much sooner than that of his parents. The jingle-jangle grew clearer and louder, and when at last it came round the corner, it was a white, gold and silver, glorious, sparkling sound.

"The Austrians are coming!" Asmus ran back into the house and shouted, and then he was outside again. Austrians are white soldiers, he knew. The Austrians were marching out of Schleswig-Holstein just at that time. They were very merry, and were playing a march:—

"My girl is a beauty, but she has no money;
But what care I for money if she calls me honey!"

And at "girl" and "she," and "what" and "she" again, the drum that was so big that you could have packed seven Asmuses into it went: "boom—boom—boom—boom!"

There were many, many soldiers, but they had all passed by at last, and the music seemed to be coming from such a distance that though Asmus put his head on one side he could not hear anything at all, and then all was over, the thousand soldiers were nothing but a white, golden, jingling, jangling memory.

Then Asmus went back into the house and set to work again. A joiner had fascinated him, and consequently he had taken to carpentering. He sat down on the floor with an old footstool in front of him, into which he had for several days been knocking

all the nails he could lay his hands on. But one day, when he was hard at work, even though he was sitting on the floor, Asmus tumbled over. His limbs began to twitch, and when he came to his senses again he heard his parents mention several times the word "convulsions." His father did not laugh any more, and his mother petted him, and then all at once a man appeared whom they called "Dr. Krause." He took little Asmus—whose clothes had been taken off—on to his knee, put a blow-pipe to his chest and back, said something in a harsh, grating voice, wrote something down, and went away. The convulsions came back several times, and they were really quite delightful things, because then Asmus always had a teaspoonful of some delicious sweet stuff given him, and later on there came seltzer-water. That didn't taste exactly nice, but it was such fun. It jumped about in the glass like a mad thing, and when you had drunk it it went on dancing on your tongue. But the best part of the convulsions was Dr. Krause. He always held his head very far back and looked up into the sky. On his head he wore a hat that was as black and long and round as a stove-pipe, only that a stove-pipe is not so rough. At his back he held a walking-stick, and on the handle of the stick he rested his head. That was the man who sent the illnesses away, and now Asmus had made up his mind he would be Dr. Krause.

The requisite stick was soon found, and he could manage to look into the sky; but the top-hat, the top-hat! Asmus begged his father to buy him a top-hat, but with all his recklessness Ludwig Semper's liberality did not go as far as that. Young Semper was therefore obliged to graduate in an imaginary top-hat, and he succeeded brilliantly. On golden summer

days, when the neighbours were standing outside their doors, Asmus, stepping out and holding himself in exact imitation of the good doctor, would go up to them, and would say in his baby voice, that was the most marvellously exact copy of the doctor's: "How do you do? I am Dr. Krause. Have you a stomach-ache?" He soon got together quite an extensive practice, and received high fees in the shape of apples, sweets, and gingerbread nuts. His best paying patient was a pretty young girl; she always received him with a very winning smile, and was his first love. Fräulein Johanna used to take the little doctor up in her arms and kiss him, though, for his size, his head was a little too big, and, to make matters worse, his nose was rather celestial. We must seize this opportunity to mention the fact that Ludwig Semper, though he had prettier children than Asmus, and was a kind patriarch to them all, made such a decided pet of Asmus that the child himself noticed it. The little four-year-old heart returned this affection with the most fervent feeling of gratitude. There must have been kinship between the souls of these two from the beginning of time — kinship stronger than blood, and only known to minds of high order.

But apart from his parents, and more particularly his father, who was like the good kind God, there was nothing in the world Asmus liked better than the beautiful young girl, the big horse-chestnut tree in front of his parents' house, and the village pond as he saw it between the trunks of the old willow-trees. But the ugliest and the most horrible things in the world were Kunigunde von Turneck and Rudenz. These were remnants of a puppet show, and they hung on the wall above his father's bench. These figures

had the most horrible painted faces and the most villainous feathered hats. Little children have a horror of anything grotesque and animal-like in a human being's appearance; that is why they scream so when men with great beards or ladies with feathers in their hats want to take them in their arms. Ludwig Semper only needed to take down one of these evil-looking figures, with their adornments *à l'indienne*, from the hook on which they hung for Asmus to become as good as gold. Later on, when he went to school, he had very little difficulty in understanding why the Romans were so afraid of the Germans who had decorated themselves with the heads of animals.

Rudenz and Kunigunde were as effective as devils and ghosts, and much more effective than his mother's iron ladles and fire-irons. Frau Rebekka Semper was very easily put out. Her explanation of this peculiarity: that with short people the blood flies to the head more quickly than with long ones, was of doubtful value from a physiological point of view. But when her blood *was* up, she hit away with whatever she might happen to have in her hand, and dealt out her blows, not according to the enormity of the crime, but according to the degree of heat to which her blood had attained. So that there were times, gloomy, anxious times, when Asmus could not love his mother. Children have the keenest sense of justice; they can love the strictest disciplinarian if he is only just.

Good luck is sure to come at last if one can only wait long enough for it, and the day came when Asmus was able to prescribe as Dr. Krause in a real *bona fide* top-hat. True, he was obliged to confine his practice to the house, for the glorious hat had been lent by the hatter for fourpence, and had to be

taken care of. In those days when you took upon yourself the vows made at your baptism a top-hat and a frock-coat were indispensable adjuncts. • Asmus opened both his eyes wide with amazement when his eldest brother—a short, slight, good-looking lad—had come in at the door thus apparelled. Leonhard, the child who caused the Sempers more anxiety than any of the others, had just been confirmed. With the exception of the glossy hat and his brother's appearance, Asmus had no other recollection connected with that day; evidently—on account most probably of the low condition of the funds just at that time—the festive occasion had not been celebrated, there had been neither rice with plums in it, nor cheese and grog. But on another occasion there must have been high tide in the little centre house in the “Kurze Elend.” For weeks little Asmus had heard a word resounding through all the rooms—a word with which he strove in vain to connect elusive glimmerings of an event that filled him with a wonderful hope and a solemn delight. His brothers and sisters had a secret from him and from one another. Ludwig, his father, gazed at him oftener than ever in smiling silence, and then looked through the window into the distance with sunshiny eyes; Mother Rebekka had a twinkle in hers when she contemplated her youngest but one, and one evening she was actually to be seen standing at the stove frying a whole pile of apple-fritters as if fire and dripping cost nothing. All her blood had flown to her head again; but nothing happened. • And when his brothers and sisters were still chattering together, and one of them began to sing: “Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her,” a door opened of its own accord, and then—there was light on earth. In later years, when Asmus glanced back at bygone days, this Christmas Eve

seemed a solitary, radiant light shining forth out of a gloomy, dreary vale of misery.

In the "Kurze Eleni" the living-rooms were on a level with the street; the chestnut-tree pushed its tapers in at the window; from the chestnut-tree to the willow-trees by the village pond a duck could flutter with three and a half beats of its wings, and Asmus's world was bounded by the glittering strip of water. Except, that is to say, when he stooped down and peered underneath the lowest branches of the willow-trees, for then he could see Mr. Schnede's thatched house on the other side of the world—but that was the end of everything.

And then one morning the whole of his world had vanished like smoke: Asmus was standing somewhere very high up, and his eyes were wandering farther and farther over endless meadows and across endless blue sky; they were travelling about in a paradise of space and were catching hundreds and hundreds of red and white cloud-butterflies. The Sempers had moved again, and were now living in the "Düstere lange Balken" (Dismal Long Beams).

CHAPTER IV

TREATS OF THE "DÜSTERE LANGE BALKEN," OF PECULIAR EYES, AND OF A MYTHICAL HORSE.

THE origin of the name "Düstere lange Balken" is wrapt in obscurity. The people of those parts were given to bestowing odd names on their places of amusement, and possibly they may have given this one to a dancing and drinking saloon in which merry couples swung round in the dance, and the chink-chink of beer-jugs and glasses was heard. But it may have been a place of execution, and on dark, dreary evenings the inhabitants of Altenberg may have looked across to the dismal long beams of the gallows. It is more probable, however, that the origin of the name is to be sought for in the Norse dialect, and that it is derived from the word, "balkr," which is used to denote a fence or boundary line; for the Düstere lange Balken stood just where the dwellings of the Altenbergers came to an end, and horses and cattle spent peaceful days in meadows that reached as far as the eye could see. Anyhow, wherever the name may have come from, there it most certainly was, and the long, narrow, winding road, with a hedge on either side of it, which was so extremely sloppy on beautiful rainy days, was really known by the name of Düstere lange Balken.

By the side of this lonesome road there stood a

single tall, gloomy, dingy-looking house, the lower half of which was used as a carpenter's shop. In this shop, and in the adjoining yard, rats and mice chiselled away from year's end to year's end, and it was only at rare intervals that human beings appeared upon the scene. In the remaining part of the house there was room for two families, provided they were content with very little space and still less comfort, and were able to get on with the long-tailed rodents.

The very first day after they had moved in Asmus was not to be found. They searched the whole house, and discovered him at last in the loft at the top.

There was plenty of space up there! Little rooms and passages, nooks and corners more than he could count! He sauntered about, and never grew tired of looking at the empty places. Every little room, every beam, every wall, every window had something different and attractive about it for him. They all had faces, though not quite like those of humans. But to look through the window over the meadows—oh! oh! There was a bush which bent over the meadow, and under the bush lay a shadow. How beautiful it was! In one spot the meadow rose up into a little hill—how beautiful! And very far away there was a wide opening in the hedge, and through the opening you could see another meadow. • How sweet it was, how good to look at!

His brothers and sisters had once been very much amused at him. They were all going with their father for a walk across the fields, and when the others had shouted out: "A hare!" "A stork!" "A church tower!", "Where? where?" had cried Asmus. He had seen nothing. But when they were all quite quiet, he had exclaimed suddenly: "Father, this place looks just like your birthday!" How they had all laughed! A

cornfield close to a wood like their father's birthday, what an idea! Ludwig Semper, however, said to his children, "There's nothing laughable about it." But after that it was only when Asmus was out alone with his father that he would remark: "Father dear, it looks like Saturday night here, doesn't it?" or, "This is like the place where Esau took the kid to Isaac." His brother Alfred had told him the story one day when he came home from school. And Ludwig Semper would look into his little son Asmus's wide-open eyes, and would say: "H'm!"

One day, when Asmus happened to be sitting at the window, he noticed, far away, at the edge of a meadow, little spots of gold jumping up every now and again and then disappearing. And a minute or so after he heard music—not pretty music though, for it was the faltering, discordant sounds made by soldiers practising signalling. As soon as Asmus found out it was soldiers, he slid quietly down from his chair, squeezed himself cautiously through the door, and scampered down the staircase as fast as his little legs would carry him. But down the last ten stairs he went more quickly than he wanted to, his head ran in advance of his feet and came into violent contact with the iron stand of a grindstone. Asmus lay perfectly still and did not utter a sound. His mother, who had rushed down to see what the noise could be, lifted him up and carried him upstairs with great lamentation. There was a broad, deep wound in his forehead. They bound it up as best they could, and then his mother hurried off with him to the Altenberg Infirmary, where at certain hours of the day people could be doctored for nothing. They were shown into a very big room with a very high ceiling, and there, in whichever direction he looked, he saw thousands of

bright knives and scissors and pincers, and all sorts of steel things, shining. Asmus believed they were all intended for him, and he felt very much perturbed and quite sick with fright. They put him on a big table, and the doctor sewed up the gaping wound. It hurt him very much ; but Asmus only uttered little moans through his clenched teeth. At last the doctor lifted him down from the table, and said : " You're a very good little man ; here's a *schilling* (= three pence) for you because you didn't cry ; ask your mamma to buy you some lollipops with it."

What a glorious infirmary ! You paid nothing, and got money for sweets as well ! What nice men the doctors were ! What a delightful day ! The morning of suffering had been followed by an afternoon of joy ; he did not feel the wound in his head ; he only felt the schilling in his hand, a whole big schilling. And when you do have good luck, a whole heap of it comes at once. What was that coming up the street with a cling-ling-ling, and a boom, boom, boom, and a rata-tata ? Austrians ! Oh ! oh ! Austrians ! But they had turned into Prussians since he had seen them before. And there was no denying the fact, Prussians were much more beautiful than Austrians. They were all on horseback, wore blue coats with silver lace, and their hats had a flat lid at the top from which some more silver lace hung, and they had swords and lances, and on the tips of their lances were little flags ! And one of them—there really couldn't be the least doubt about it—one of them laughed at him ! Asmus felt as if God Himself had smiled down at him from His Heaven. They were marching along at no great distance from the Sempers' house, and when Asmus heard that they went along that same street almost every morning, he had found

an object in life. And when he had reviewed them two or three times he came to a decision. Every Saturday his father took the cigars he had made to the manufacturer, and then for two, sometimes even for three, days he had money in his pocket. His father usually brought home a few sweets or an apple or two. Next time he must bring him a horse! Yes, a horse!

"Father!" he called out, rushing breathlessly into the room, "when you take the cigars away again, don't bring me back an apple; I'd rather have a horse!"

Ludwig Semper did not exclaim, in a voice full of astonishment, "A horse?", for he was well aware that in the heart of a little child there are endless pasture lands; he agreed without much ado, but his shoulders jumped up and down again. From that moment Asmus talked and dreamt of nothing but horses and riding. Though there was no horse in it, the whole house resounded with stamping and neighing. The horse was to graze in the meadow outside, and he was to sleep upstairs in the loft. Next Saturday morning, from nine o'clock until noon, Asmus stood in the road waiting for his father to come galloping home.

"Wiebke Wiese!" he shouted out—that was the name of his playmate, the daughter of the man who shared the house with them—"Wiebke Wiese, get out of the way, or my father will ride over you when he comes!" and they both stepped back on to the path and left the road free. But at noon they saw Ludwig Semper coming back on his own legs as usual.

"Where's the horse?" called out Asmus.

"The bones are not ready yet," replied Ludwig Semper regretfully.

This seemed to Asmus a perfectly satisfactory

reason. A horse without bones—he quite understood—would not be at all the sort of thing he wanted. And Ludwig Semper did right in giving him such an answer; for his little son had now another whole week of riding and racing, and neighing and rearing.

The next Saturday Asmus stood by the roadside again, and called out: "Take care, Wiebke." But once more his father came back on foot.

"Where's the horse?" asked his son.

"The skin is not ready yet," answered his father, "but I have brought you something else instead."

And then he produced a sheet of coloured pictures, consisting of about twenty horses with red hussars riding on them. That surpassed the wildest flight of Asmus's imagination. At that moment the real live horse died and the twenty came to life.

But one morning when Asmus was playing at soldiers he heard a very curious noise. An Uhlan was lying in the field where the soldiers were drilled. He had shot himself in the head, and all his brains were scattered about. Without his parents noticing it, Asmus ran off to the field, and there he found a crowd of people standing round the dead man. But the corpse had been covered over with a sheet, and Asmus could only see indistinct outlines of a man's body. He contemplated it with a feeling of horror he had not known until then.

"It never entered my head before that a fellow could have such a big brain!" said a fat man. "His brain was as big as that!" he exclaimed, with a grin, and a gesture intended to show the size of the dead man's brain.

When the dead Uhlan had been taken away on a cart, and the crowd had dispersed, Asmus went home

on his little legs at a pace that was unusually slow. Why had he killed himself? He had a horse and a sword, and a lovely hat with lute on it! He wondered if it could have been the Uhlan who had once looked at him and laughed.

The curtain that hid the actualities of life from him had shifted a little, and through a narrow chink Asmus had caught a slight glimpse of something he did not yet understand. But he had an inkling that what he had taken for the end of the world was really only a curtain, and that behind that curtain there was more than he had known about up to the present time.

CHAPTER V

TREATS OF OPERAS AND OF OTHER THINGS, SERIOUS
AND COMIC, AS WELL AS OF THE REMARKABLE
BEHAVIOUR OF JOHANNES.

ASMUS had not the least doubt that at the edge of the world it was more beautiful and more wonderful than anywhere else. One could sit for hours at the window, or on the little hill in the meadow, and contemplate the edge of the world, and wonder and wonder what was to be seen there, what was going on there, whether it was possible to get there. Very often during the day, one could see a snake going past in the distance, very far away; it sent out smoke, and when the wind was just above it you could hear it screech. The grown-ups called it a railway. "I wonder if you could see it if you went close up to it?" thought Asmus. "If you can I should like to play with it."

But one summer evening, quite a different sort of wonder appeared at the other end of the world! The Sempers were going for a walk between the hedgerows of the Düstere lange Balken with all their children, with the exception of the one-year-old Reinhold. All at once, there was a loud report, and then a huge fiery snake went hissing through the sky. And when Asmus was just thinking there could be nothing more beautiful than that in the world, the head of the snake opened, and out came red, blue, and green stars. They

were letting off fireworks at the "Schützenhof." And when the popping and crackling and sparkling had gone on for some time, Ludwig Semper suddenly called out "Sst!", and then you heard soft wonderful music. Now and again Asmus had heard his father say: "That is from *Fidelio*," or: "That is from the *Huguenots*," without having the vaguest idea of the meaning of *Fidelio* and *Huguenots*.

"Is that from *Fidelio*?" he asked now.

"No," replied Ludwig Semper, "that's from *Der Freischütz*. Just listen."

And Asmus listened, and the next time the band played he asked, in a very subdued little voice, "Father, what is that from?"

"That's from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*."

"Seviglia? Seviglia?" The word pleased the child, there was something familiar and pleasant about it. One cloudless, sunshiny Sunday his mother had gone about the rooms of their flat in her cheery way, singing:—

"Nach Sevilla, nach Sevilla!

Wo die letzten Häuser stehen,
Sich die Nachbarn freundlich grüssen
Mädchen aus dem Fenster sehen,
Ihre Blumen zu begiessen
Ach, da sehnt mein Herz sich hin!

In Sevilla, in Sevilla

Weiss ich wohl ein reines Stübchen
Helle Küche, stille Kammer,
In dem Hause wohnt mein Liebchen
Und am Pfortchen glänzt ein Hammer
Poch ich, macht die Jungfrau auf."

From that day, "Seviglia" represented to Asmus a public square surrounded by houses, over which hung an eternal golden sun that never ceased to shine—a square suffused with a bright, peaceful, everlasting, holiday happiness.

At the time his parents had been children the Romantic Period was not quite over. They had heard the echoes of the war-songs of 1813. In the house of Ludwig Semper's father had rescinded the mournful strains of a Salis-Seewis and a Matthison, and Ludwig's elder sisters had wept in secret over *Sigwart, the Story of a Convent*. Thus the childhood of Asmus was connected by a stream of musical sounds with the childhood of the nineteenth century, and even in later years, whenever he read or thought of the Wars of Liberation, he would hear through the din of battle his father's voice:—

“Far o'er the Rhine flood, blood-red flames are glowing,
Arm German brothers; 'tis the bugles blowing.”

Or his mother's:—

“Ere long, fair maiden, thou wilt crown the victor,
Binding with laurels his beloved brow.”

In the Sempers' house a great deal of singing went on; father, mother, and all the children sang. Though when their dinner had consisted of potato-skins on bread their throats would be dried up for a time; an hour later, however, they would all be able to sing again. And as soon as he caught the sound of singing anywhere about, Asmus would throw down his hammer, or his whip, or his sword, or whatever he might have in his hand, and prick up his ears like a little hare.

From right over there, where in the evening Asmus very often saw a big sheaf of flames shooting up out of the chimney of an iron-foundry, from right over there Autumn came one morning with torn cloud banners, and chased away to the end of the world Summer, sunshine, and leaves. And then Winter

came and sprinkled white sugar over the whole earth in one night. Ludwig Semper led his Asmus up to the window, and said :—

“Just look! sugar everywhere, nothing but sugar,” and as he said it rays went out from his eyes in every direction.

Asmus smiled, but rather dubiously. Even he had ceased to believe in so much sugar. But at the next opportunity he went down all the same and tasted it. No, decidedly snow did not taste sweet.

On winter days, when the bandy-legged little stove exerted itself to such an extent that its cheeks got as red as fire, Ludwig Semper would sit at his bench and make cigars, his sons, Leonhard and Johannes, helping him. When the mother had finished her work in the kitchen and bedroom she would help too; the youngest child, little Reinhold, would lie in his cradle, and Asmus would play about amongst them all, and everything smelt of tobacco and was covered with tobacco-dust. The only one at school was Alfred; the sisters were out at service with strangers.

In the tobacco-room—workshop, sitting-room, dining-room, reception-room, drawing-room, library and nursery were all combined in the most practical way imaginable, and this was all attained in a space four metres long by four metres broad.

One day, Asmus, who was playing at soldiers, had been shooting at every member of his family with a walking-stick, and had killed them several times; they had all fallen over and had got up again. All at once the gun turned into a trumpet, and Asmus strode up to his father and said :—

“How do you do? I am the music-maker. Shall I play you something from *Der Freischütz*?”

“Yes, please,” said Ludwig Semper, laughing.

And clear and true Asmus blew on the walking-stick the *jubelmotiv* :—

• “Max, hat einen Schuss gethan.”

After that Ludwig Semper and the rest of them did not laugh, but stared at the little trumpeter quite dumbfounded.

“Shall I play the *Barber of Seville* to you now?” asked Asmus.

“Please,” cried out Ludwig Semper.

And Asmus blew as correctly as you please—

“Never think to blind or coax me,
Gentle chick, you cannot hoax me.”

When the little musician noticed that he was creating a sensation he played enough to fill a programme.

“Now turns *Joseph in Egypt*,” he called out.

“Where is Egypt?” asked Ludwig Semper,

“Egypt is a meadow,” answered Asmus, with decision. He had once heard that storks went to Egypt, and he had once seen several storks standing in a meadow. So he had come to the conclusion that Egypt must be a meadow, and he blew—

“I was young; my heart was teeming,
With the hope that I was loved.”

“He ought to have a piano or a violin,” exclaimed Johannes rapturously.

“Yes, yes, of course he ought to,” said Ludwig Semper, and then went on making cigars with all the energy possible. That day he dreamt that if he worked hard enough he would be able to earn sufficient money to buy a piano or a violin for his little Asmus.

If in the course of several long weeks, Leonhard or Johannes had succeeded in saving up five schillings they would go one evening to the gallery of the

Municipal Theatre. When they set off Asmus would stand gazing after them for a long time, his little heart filled with a vague longing. For he knew that the next day, with shining eyes and glowing cheeks, they would never cease singing and talking about what they had seen and heard.

They would tell of wonderful landscapes with the moon passing over them, of costly garments, and of beautiful songs such as

"Rezia is thine for ever."

Or of a number of men standing on the stage who drew their swords and sang—

"Our cause is just and holy,
And thus with naught of fear
We shall obey the King."

Ah! how glorious it must be when Count Nevers refuses to have anything to do with the murderer's atrocious plot, all by himself, quite alone against all those assassins. And Asmus slipped away to the loft, and when he had made sure that he was quite alone he drew out his walking-stick and sang—

"For, though in honour's cause
My blood may flow,
'Mongst these my ancestors
I'd have you know
Are heroes brave, but no assassins vile."

Then Asmus-Saint Bris broke in with—

"Through you our just cause then
Soon must be betrayed?"

And Asmus-Nevers answered him with flashing eyes—

"For murder was my good sword never made,
Take it, 'tis there; and
Heaven my judge must be."

and he threw down his sword at the feet of the invisible but shameless Saint-Bris, just as Leonhard had described it by word and action. Oh, theatre, theatre! would he ever go to a theatre, he wondered?

It was in December that Johannes called out hurriedly to Asmus, who was just about to enter the room:—

“Don’t come in! Don’t come in!” and made great haste to hide something under the table. What could be the meaning of that? A few minutes later Johannes came out and told Asmus he might go into the room. Then, underneath the chair on which his brother had been sitting, Asmus discovered a piece of cardboard about as big as his hand. Evidently something had been cut out of the cardboard, for there was a hole in it, and the hole was the shape of a human being. What could be the meaning of that?

CHAPTER VI

WHY ASMUS BROKE THE MILK-JUG, WHY HE HAD NO
CHANCE OF GETTING TO HEAVEN, AND WHY HE
LOOKED SILLY.

IN the meantime, Christmas was coming nearer and nearer. Asmus had saved up two schillinge, and with them he wanted to buy a milk-jug for his mother. He was waiting outside the door leading to Christmas with the milk-jug in his hand. His heart was going pit-a-pat; for strange, intangible reports, whispered warnings and significant whispers, had been whirring about in the air for some days. The others had looked at him perpetually out of the corners of their eyes, and then they had laughed. When the door opened very slowly and with a gentle creak, and he caught sight of something glistening, Asmus dashed in—

“There, mother, there’s a . . . handle for you,” he said, for he had knocked the milk-jug against the door-post, and now all that he held in his hand was the handle. What a wonderful day that was was proved by the fact that when he looked anxiously into his mother’s face he saw that she was not at all cross, and that she did not scold him, but only went into fits of laughter; they all went off into fits of laughter, every one of them. Then he made another dash, a very gleeful one, and found on the Christmas table—a toy theatre.

He stood in front of it, and did not dare to ask to whom it belonged. To take it for granted that it was his would be very forward, he thought, and he felt he should not like to be told that it had not been put there for him. He could not understand, either, how such a splendid thing could have found its way into his parents' house—such a poor place as it was. At last he took courage and asked:—

“Who did you borrow that from?”

Then they all laughed again, and shouted out all at the same time that his brother Johannes had made it for him, and that it belonged to him.

All Asmus was able to get out in reply was, “O—o—oh!” All at once he looked about for his brother Johannes, rushed up to him, pressed his head quite close up against his body, and then went back to his theatre.

Some scenery representing a forest had been set up; the forester Cuno, Caspar, Max, the peasant Kilian, and all sorts of supers were standing on the stage. A single board composed this stage, and had to represent the whole of the world. Into this world holes had been bored, and into these holes, by means of pegs, the whole of the scenery was stuck. That was all the mechanism there was about it, and yet, simple as it was, it was the source of greater joy and happiness than Lautenschläger's most complicated apparatus. The figures had to be held in one position, but usually only for a second or two; the peasant Kilian scraped carrots for Max, the huntsman, as long as he was on the stage; during the marriage ceremony the young Countess vom Strahl held tight hold of the bundle which, as Kätschen, she had taken with her from her parents' house; and the Representatives of the three Forest-cantons swore with a

persistence that was quite unprecedented. Little flat blocks of wood were fastened to the feet of all the figures, and they had pieces of wire attached to their heads, but for Asmus they walked and sat down and danced and floated about as if they were real live human beings and gods. It was only on rare occasions that that kind boy Johannes had time to arrange a performance, but when he had it was done with great spirit and pathos. A play that Asmus considered very beautiful was the *Huguenots*, for in that there was shooting; but *Kätchen von Heilbronn* he considered more beautiful still, because in that a castle was burnt down with Bengal fire; but the play of plays was *Der Freischütz*, for in that there were two shots, a devil, and, in the Wolf's Glen, a Catherine-wheel!

What a reckless set of people the whole lot of them were, those Sempers. That was made evident every time *Der Freischütz* was performed, for then they let off fireworks to the value of two schillinge (to the value of sixpence in our money, therefore). Yes, most of those Sempers would have been quite capable of making a rocket out of a good-sized piece of their own lives, and of sending it up into the air, if it would only have given them a beautiful shower of coloured sparks.

The grand, euphonious speeches which his brother read from a book intoxicated Asmus with delight; he was completely fascinated by the woods and dungeons and halls on the stage, but nothing equalled the Catherine-wheel in the Wolf's Glen.

On one occasion at a gala performance, at which some grandees were present, two Catherine-wheels were actually let off. The children belonging to the family in which Asmus's sister Marianne acted as

nursemaid had come to see it. The fame of the grand doings in the *Düstere lange Balken* had reached as far as the big city of Hamburg. When the pretty, daintily-dressed little girls entered the Sempers' house it seemed to Asmus like a sweet, solemn note of music. The elder one had a very clear-cut little face and a great quantity of golden hair, the younger one had a round face and looked very gentle and sweet-tempered. They spoke remarkably pure German—and they wore gloves. Asmus could not take his eyes off them, and seemed to be worshipping them. And when they spoke very kindly to and smiled at him, it was as if angels had come down from Heaven for the purpose of playing with him. For weeks after he fretted because he could not see them again. He had once heard that some people went to Heaven and others to Hell. Now he understood it. Little girls like those went to Heaven, of course and then he looked down at his own legs and thought: "You will never be able to get in with trousers and boots like these."

On the days when there were no performances, he used to take out the little dolls and properties and contemplate them with silent satisfaction. He would look steadily into the face of each cardboard figure for some minutes to see if he could find out what it was thinking about at that particular moment. He would place them up in front of him, and look attentively at their dresses, their hats, and their weapons. Count Wetter vom Strahl, with his golden armour, his golden helmet, and his brightly coloured plume, he always considered the most beautiful, and he loved him as if he had been a real, live human being. Then he would take the scenery, and would wander in thought far, far away into the depths

of the dark shady forest and into the sunny gardens ; with wondering eyes would go on and on through the sumptuous hall of the knights, and would feel his way shudderingly along the walls of the dungeon with the skeleton chained to his wrist. He would sit at the bottom of the Wolf's Glen, and would stare up at the place where moon's milk rippled over ghostlike ruins, until he was almost beside himself with the horror of the thing, and was obliged to shut his eyes. And by degrees, but gaining in strength every day, the desire to learn to read took root and grew up. Ah yes, to be able to read, then he would be able to manage all those lovely plays himself, and he attacked his father.

"Fahser, teach me to read. Fahser dear, teach me to read."

"Yes, yes, you shall learn to read," said his father.

"Shall we begin now?" exclaimed Asmus excitedly.

"No, not to-day. Soon, very soon;" and he was quite sincere when he said "soon," was the good Ludwig Semper; he was quite willing to teach his pet to read, but he went on saying "soon," and "soon," for weeks and months. So at last Asmus got hold of his brother Alfred, and Alfred told him the names of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet one after the other; for Alfred was no Pestalozzi. Asmus made him go through them a second time, and then he knew them. Now I can read, he said to himself triumphantly. But he had only got in the thin end of the wedge, the thick one had to be reckoned with.

"O—en," he read,

"No, that spells 'on,'" cried Alfred.

"What? •But o—en is there?"

"Yes, but when you read it, it is 'on.'"

That was funny, first of all you learn the letters,

and then when you read they have a different sound. But he did not give it up.

"Aitch—a—ahre," he read.

"Good, gracious, how stupid you are!" shouted Alfred. "That's 'hare.'"

"Ah—ah—ah—" now it dawned on Asmus. "When you read it is not aitch, but H." And he made another attempt and read—

"Hed—ge—e."

Alfred almost died with laughing.

"Hed—ge—e," he screamed out, hopping and skipping about the room. "'Hedge,' that's 'hedge,' boy! What an idiot you are, to be sure."

Then Asmus got cross too.

"Here's hed—ge—e anyhow," he cried. "You can't read yourself."

"Oh, really," that was a little too much for Alfred. "You donkey, you don't even know when an e's short and when it's long."

So there were two kinds of e's! Asmus stared at his brother in bewilderment.

"Ye—es! When 'e' is short it is called 'e,' and when 'u' is short it is called 'u,' and when 'a' is short it is called 'a,' and 'i' is called 'i,' and 'o' is called 'o.'"

Asmus's eyes grew bigger and bigger during this hocus-pocus. He looked as if he wanted to suck the words from his brother's lips.

"Don't make such an idiotic face, boy!" exclaimed Alfred.

When all a man's thoughts have gone out into the world, the body stands there quite forsaken and forlorn, and the eyes look like empty windows. Then people say you are making an idiotic face.

Alfred ran off; he gave the whole thing up. Not

so Asmus. He sat for hours with his brother's primer in front of him, and dug his elbows into the table and hunted out the words until he was able to read. And the second or third day he succeeded in deciphering, though very slowly, *Hans and Liese*,

Oh my, that was the delightful story about the sausage that had made him laugh so! And then he dug his elbows farther into the table, his cheeks grew crimson, his eyes bigger and bigger, and he went on reading—on and on—and he had learnt to read. If a word did happen to come that was too difficult for him, he would make a guess at it from the context, and he was more often right than not; but if it was much too difficult, he would ask his father to tell him what it was, and when he had been told, he would say, "H'm!" just like his father, and go on reading. He was never to be seen now without an old primer, which was minus its cover and the last few pages. At meal-times he kept it under his arm, it went to bed with him at night. When he went downstairs to play with Wiebke Wiese, he took it with him, and read aloud to her, until she ran away. With the book under his arm he would look at his brother Alfred as if he were an absolutely superfluous being; in a fortnight's time he was able to read every bit as well as his conceitedly impatient teacher.

CHAPTER VII

A SAILING-VESSEL AND CLOUD-SHIFTER APPEAR WITH IPHIGENIA, MEDEA, MÜNCHHAUSEN, AND EULENSPIEGEL ON BOARD.

It was just about this time that there came sailing into the room one morning a long, lean youth, who steered straight up to Leonhard and Johannes and called out, with rolling eyes:—

“O-oh!—you fellows! Yesterday, Iphigenia. O-oh! you should have seen Charlotte Wolter—o-oh! Good morning to you, good morning to you.”

There is no other word for it but “sailing,” for the long tails of his coat were flapping behind him exactly like sails. He was a youth of seventeen, but he was wearing a full-sized coat which his father had cast off. Despite this voluminous garment, however, the corners of his elbows and knees were always in evidence. He sank down on a chair and sighed out:

“You can imagine the way she said: ‘For men should have fear of the gods.’” And then up he jumped again, and casting his eyes up to the ceiling—a ceiling covered with brown tobacco-dust—he recited fearlessly, and with resounding pathos, the song of the Fates. Then down he sank on his chair again, protruded his drooping Hapsburg underlip, and put his head on one side like Friedrich Schiller.

"This evening she will play *Medea*," he shouted out, and then jumped up again. "Will you go with me? I'm going myself."

But Leonhard and Johannes had no money. A seat cost five schillings.

"I have eight schillings, you can have three of them!" the sailor said to Leonhard.

Johannes had two schillings; he was willing to lend them to Leonhard, who would then be able to go.

Leonhard would have liked to have been magnanimous enough to refuse them, but he could not manage it.

Johannes sat there with a rather dejected expression on his face in spite of his magnanimity.

Then Ludwig Semper opened his great eyes, and they and his mouth said to Johannes—

"You can go too. I can manage to find enough for that."

Then, such happiness and gleeful joy reigned in the Sempers' home that Asmus, who was sitting on the floor, thought to himself: "To-day is a great holiday."

The next morning only very few cigars were made, and those few were not particularly successful ones. *Medea* was always in the way, the golden fleece was to be seen glittering in every direction. The flames from Kreon's palace were always blazing up. In the middle of rolling the tobacco their hands would suddenly come to a standstill, and their eyes would gaze at the dead bodies of *Æson* and *Absyrtus*. And at a very early hour, too, the sailor came into port, laid to and cast anchor.

"Eh! eh! I say, lad, old fellow, just imagine how she tears her mantle—raaaatsch!—from the top to the

bottom—o-oh! And then—just imagine”—the sailor threw his hand far away into the air:—

“Stand back, assail Medea if you dare!
I go, but, King, remember well this hour;
A worse one thou hast never seen, I tell thee.
Make way! I go, but vengeance shall go with me.”

“Yes,” cried Leonhard, “and then when she says, ‘Jason, I know a song!’”

“Yes,” cried Johannes, “and when she snaps the lyre.”

And the three of them never ceased o-o-ohing and a-a-ahing, and Ludwig Semper’s eyes took a long look into the depths of the well of memory, and then looked up again bedewed with moisture but smiling and shining. The only way these youths could give expression to their delight in beautiful things was by exclaiming O-oh! and ah! and ripping, and stunning; and yet, strange to say, there burnt in their hearts the truest and holiest fire that art has ever kindled.

Heinrich Moldenhuber was the name of the sailing-vessel; he was the son of a poor workman who earned very little and toiled very hard in a sugar-factory. Leonhard and Johannes, who had made his acquaintance at a wretched little night-school, always called him the “Cloud-Shifter.” Now, the Cloud-Shifter was of importance to the mental development of Asmus in two ways.

Firstly, as soon as he entered the room it was his custom to turn his back on Asmus, then it was Asmus’s custom to put his short little arms into the pockets of those famous coat-tails. He had to exert himself very considerably to get to the bottom of them, but when he had succeeded he

would bring forth into the light of day a big round apple.

Secondly, the Cloud-Shifter was the means, though quite unconscious of it himself, of introducing little Semper to the literature of Germany. Even when Ludwig Semper and the three young fellows were talking about things far above his comprehension, Asmus used to listen to them without their noticing it; the doors of his little heart standing wide open, like those of a little church on a Sunday morning in summer, and a bright service going on inside. Even though he failed to understand their words, he was encompassed, as they were, by a network of golden rays; he felt: What they are talking about, thinking about, is something beautiful, splendid, joyous, you can see that from their faces. He acquired very mixed ideas with regard to the history of literature; for they would talk of Goethe, and immediately afterwards of Rabener, of Herder, and then of Lichtwer, sometimes of Shakespeare, and then of Musäus, of Hebbel, and then of Uz, maybe.

The Cloud-Shifter very rarely appeared without bringing books with him, and these, when added to those already possessed by the Sempers, formed, in time, quite a nice little library. At the barrow in the Spielmarkt you could get whole dramas by Schiller and Leisewitz, the whole of Heine's or Hagedorn's poems for a schilling. The small amount of pocket-money the three were able to get hold of went either to the barrow or to the theatre. They were wonderful books, those foxy, mildewed old books. They had copperplates in them; in some of them their owner in the days of the boys' great-grandfathers, had written his name in ornamental writing. A gentle,

peaceful feeling seemed to creep round your heart as soon as you opened one of them. There was a copy of *Don Carlos*, in which some one had written his name when Schiller was still alive! Many of them had been printed during Goethe's lifetime; he was still living, you know, when Ludwig Semper was a boy! How often had Ludwig told them that it would not be possible for him ever to forget that morning in March when the "Justizrat" had called out across the street to Mr. Carsten Semper, "Have you heard the news? Goethe is dead."

The little five-year-old boy would sit for hours at the table, or on the floor in a corner of the room, turning over page after page of these books, looking into them quietly, and reading a little piece here and there.

He opened one of them:—*Julius of Tarentum*, by Johann Anton Leisewitz.

He had heard that there was something in it about one brother killing another. How splendid that must be to read about. He began, but he could not manage it. It was too difficult. He took up another one of which they had been talking: Zimmermann's *On Solitude*. He would try that. But he could not manage that either, it was more difficult still.

Then one day Leonhard rushed into the room, waving a book about in his right hand. "*Münchhausen, Münchhausen!*" he shouted.

There must no doubt have been some reason why he should have been the one to have a special fancy for *Münchhausen*. Asmus set to work at it, and it suited him too. The narrator's marvellous adventures delighted him, not his capacity for lying. He was told they were lies, but Asmus believed the delightful baron and did not believe his brother. He loved the man who had had such strangely delightful

experiences, and defended him in his own mind against the accusation of telling lies. He considered the stag with the cherry-tree growing out of his head very beautiful, and consequently he believed in him; and why should not the baron have ridden through the air on a cannon-ball? It must be glorious to fly like that over fields and forests. True, the affair of the rope fastened to the moon, that was cut through at the top and knotted together again at the bottom, was rather a staggerer; there was something suspicious about that. . . .

One evening, after Asmus had extracted the usual apple from the depths of his coat-pocket, the Cloud-Shifter cried out—

"Try the other pocket now;" and behold out of the gloomy depths there came, with a laugh, *Till Eulenspiegel*. Asmus had also opinions of his own about this book. He considered some of Eulenspiegel's tricks great fun, and laughed over them; but most of them he thought very stupid, and they bored him excessively. But the little book made of coarse paper, quite foxy with age, contained rudely drawn old woodcuts, and for a long time these continued to have a great attraction for him.

It was on a Saturday evening that the book had been given to him, and after that he thought it quite lovely to snuggle down close to the stove as soon as the last rays of the setting sun fell through the window, and to contemplate the pictures silently, but he enjoyed this most of all on Saturday evenings, when he could think about the next day at the same time. He read each picture stroke by stroke as if they had been letters. Behind the walls and hills in the pictures he saw human beings and things that were not there at all. He followed the lines of the hills

and brooks far, far beyond the border of the picture, and a deep, warm feeling of comfort seemed to fold its arms so closely round him that he would duck his head as a kitten does when it is being stroked and petted.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLS OF LITTLE ASMUS'S THREE PLAYFELLOWS, AND
OF ONE MORE, AND OF BAD PEOPLE WHO WOULD
NOT GIVE CREDIT.

BUT the reign of the bandy-legged dwarf with the round, bright-red cheeks was coming to an end, and Spring, that young prince, freed from Winter's spell, was jumping, with his shoes in his hand, across the hedges and ditches. He pressed his little nose against every window, and with his hands on each side of his eyes peered in, like the bold rascal he was; and then, with a shout of laughter, skipped away to the next one. Asmus dashed downstairs after him. The two surveyed one another for some little while at a distance, like two boys who have not quite made up their minds whether they will have a game of fisticuffs, and neither of whom wishes to be the first to speak. But Spring had a bird in his hand, and that put an end to all shyness.

"What is that?" asked Asmus.

The prince threw the bird into the air—it flew across the meadow screaming:—Dreep-dreep!

"That is a starling," said Spring; and so it came about that they began to talk and play together.

It was not very often that Asmus played with Wiebke Wiese now; she always wanted to play with dolls, and Asmus had no time now for girls' dolls.

He would not condescend even to take hold of one. His brother Alfred was obliged to go to school, and when he came home he had to strip tobacco, and on the rare occasions when he could come down to play he devoted himself by preference to the exciting sport of hunting rats and mice. Asmus thought also that to catch and kill animals was jolly fun, but when he saw the creatures' hairless tails a shudder ran from the crown of his head down the whole of his back, and he would not have taken hold of one of those tails for a thousand apples or a thousand lollipops. Or Alfred wanted to play marbles and to win a whole lot. And Asmus always lost—always, always, always! And Alfred, the bad boy, would never give him back the marbles he lost. So he played in the spacious meadow with no other companion but the prince, as a rule. •

They took the hollow stalks of the dandelions, slit up the ends of the stalks and then threw them into the water, and five minutes afterwards they fished out splendid candelabras, twisted pillars and field-marshal's bâtons. Spring said, "If you make a slit in the middle they'll turn into finer things still." Asmus tried, and they really did. And when the dandelions had run to seed, Asmus blew the down into Spring's face; but he, merry little chap that he was, blew it back again, so that the feathery hairs flew all over Asmus's blouse and into his face.

"Now I'll see how long I've got to live," said Asmus. He blew on to the fluffy head of another flower, but only succeeded in blowing down a few of the hairs.

Then Spring blew over his shoulder, and all the hairs flew away. He was able to go on blowing for a longer time.

"Now we will run right over there to that very blue place in the sky," cried Spring; and Asmus ran too. But when he had run a hundred yards or so he turned round, and behold! his home looked ever so much smaller.

"I don't want to play any more," he said, puffing and panting.

"Oh, nonsense!" cried the little king. "Come along! See how blue it is over there; and just look at those white strips in between. It's getting brighter and brighter."

"No," said Asmus, "we shall lose our way."

"Ha! ha! lose our way," scoffed the royal rascal. "You little coward."

Asmus was annoyed that he should call him a coward. He had heard the word coward quite distinctly, but he turned back all the same.

Another time they were gathering fungi.

"Those are poisonous," said the prince.

"No," said Asmus, "those are mushrooms. My father says rich people eat them."

"But those are not mushrooms."

"But I tell you they are," and Asmus was going to eat one, but he thought perhaps it would be better not to.

And thus they played day after day, and Asmus did not notice that he himself was becoming a bigger and fatter little dreamer, and that the prince had grown into a very handsome man, who had changed his name to Summer; that he had glowing, golden eyes. Summer carried him about in his warm arms. When he fell asleep in the grass he bent the sweet-scented bushes over him; when he was awake he pointed to the light and to the clouds, and said:—

"There, that is exactly like what it was one

! afternoon when you were living in that other house!" or, "Just look behind that hill over there, you can see that song from *Fidelio* floating about—

'Oh, Hope, dear solace of the desolate,
Sweet, all-sustaining Hope.'

And look,"—he showed him a tiny opening in the hedge, through which he could see a tree in the far distance,—"look, that is just like it was once a long time ago, when your mother was rocking you in her arms and you stared up at the ceiling."

And Asmus went on dreaming and playing, and did not notice that the bright, sunshiny young man had become an older one, with a great brown beard, and that he was now wearing a gamekeeper's jacket and had feathers in his hat. He led him to the trees on the eastern confines of the meadow, and then he shook the trees, and green balls came tumbling down; as they touched the ground they burst open, and sparkling, bright brown eyes, suffused with moisture, looked out at him from between soft, white eyelids. Those were chestnuts, and Asmus never tired of taking the glossy brown kernels out of the white, satin-lined cavities of the green fruit, though—alas!—as soon as the light of day fell on them they became dull and damp, and however long and however hard you rubbed them, you could never get them to look as glossy and beautiful again as they were when you first caught sight of them. And Autumn, the kind uncle, taught him how to thread the chestnuts on a string, and then to hang them round his neck as the jewelled necklet of a king; and one morning he went so far as to lead him up to an oak-tree and call his attention to the little goblets with the acorns in them, which with their little stalks looked just like tiny tobacco-pipes.

"Put one into your mouth," said Autumn.

Asmus did as he was told.

"There, you see! Exactly like a pipe!"

Asmus was as proud as proud could be. ~~He~~ was now a man he felt.

"I'll tell you somesing," he said; "my fahser has a whole lot of cigars. I'd like to smoke a cigar."

"Why don't you then?" said Autumn. "It's great fun."

The next morning, Asmus walked up and down in front of the house, sometimes twisting a cigar between his teeth, sometimes holding it between his fingers, turning it about and testing its burning qualities with the air of a connoisseur. But it was not really burning, for he had not lighted it. He did not care about the actual smoking, all he wanted to do was to pretend; it was sheer delight in the acting of a part.

Before very long a window opened, and the neighbour woman's head appeared. Asmus put the hand that was holding the cigar behind his back. He had a vague idea that it was the correct thing to do.

"Well, Asmus, are you taking a walk?"

"Yes, it's such lovely weather."

"Don't you feel quite well?"

"Yes, there's nothing the matter with me."

"Oh!"

The woman smiled in a very odd way, and very soon Asmus's parents appeared at another window. Asmus, naturally, could not be aware of the fact that the neighbour woman had hurried off to his mother, and had cried out:—

"I say, Frau Semper, come along to the window as quick as ever you can and look at your Asmus. It's enough to make you die o' laughing, he's strutting up and down smoking a cigar!"

His parents also began to talk to Asmus in a casual sort of way about the weather and the sunshine, but he kept his hand behind his back the whole time; he considered it the safer course to pursue. And it was not until the three of them had vanished from the window that he ventured to resume his walk and enjoy his morning cigar again. Then he recommenced, holding the fragrant weed to his nose every now and again, or fanning towards his face with his left hand the smoke that was not there at all, like the most critical smoker of the best cigars, or a professional tester of imported ones. The idea never entered his innocent, unsuspecting little mind that they were standing behind the curtains and were enjoying the sight immensely. . . .

When more and more white threads appeared in Autumn's brown beard, and his eyes became as clear and transparent as ice, Asmus ran away from him into the house. He did not yet understand how kind and beautiful Winter really is. For that he needed good stout boots, thick stockings, and a thick overcoat. Boots and winter overcoats are an expensive fashion, and it was as much as the Sempers could do to wrap up even passably well those of the family who were absolutely obliged to go out into the cold. Moreover, an extraordinary change had taken place this winter in the Sempers' house. The father and the big boys were away nearly the whole of the day; only putting in an appearance twice as a rule, at noon and in the evening. The room was beautifully tidy and clean from morning to night, and Asmus was allowed to stand and walk about wherever he liked. That suited him exactly, and he thought this kind of life very nice, for a change. But it was rather a different thing when his mother

took to disappearing for hours at a time, and that happened oftener and oftener—and he was obliged to stay at home with little Reinhold. He had to rock the little fellow for hours at a time, and that he thought an awful bore. As soon as he stopped rocking, little Reinhold would begin to scream. At last the little six-year-old took the little two-year-old out of the cradle, sat down on a stool and held him on his knees. The baby liked that, and so did his nurse—for ten minutes. But then a most dreadful longing to play took possession of him, and he put Reinhold back into his proper place. Such treatment did not suit Reinhold at all, so he squealed like an angry elephant. Then Asmus was obliged to take him out again, and to hold him on his knees for hours and hours, and the whole time Reinhold only said “dadadada” and “babababa,” and never uttered a sensible word. Then little Asmus’s heart actually hurt him, it was so full of longing for some other occupation. But, strange to say, by degrees comfort seemed to be flowing out towards him from his little brother’s warm little body; a tender feeling of affection awoke in him for the little fellow whom, until then, he had only looked upon as an uninteresting little animal. It was a delight to him now to feel the soft, brown, little cheek against his own. He would contemplate with feelings of astonishment and pleasure the wonderful little fingers. He began playing with the child, and was almost as delighted as a mother when Reinhold laughed, or even went so far as to shout with joy.

Asmus would have been quite happy now had it not been for another untoward circumstance. It was not only his parents and brothers who had taken to disappearing, but at their midday meal the meat had

also disappeared from the table, and the butter from the bread. Day after day there was nothing to eat but dumplings and prunes. And it was not so very long before there was nothing left but dumplings and bread. Then it dawned on Asmus. True, he had heard that his parents and brothers were looking for work, but he had fancied to go out every day and look for work must be great fun. All at once, however, the situation was clear to him: they had no money left, they were earning no money, and without money the naughty, bad people wouldn't give them any bread or any butter. But he was to get a still clearer idea of the situation. Every day his father or mother, or one of his brothers, came home with the words:—

“The grocer won't let us have anything more on credit,” or “The butcher wants his money first,” or “The baker won't let me have any more bread; he's going to sue us for the money we owe him.” But far worse things were to come. When the manger is empty the horses bite each other. One morning, as his parents were talking together, they grew more and more excited, they said unkind things to one another, and at last Ludwig Semper shouted out:—

“You must manage as best you can. I'm at the end of my resources,” and he rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER IX

TELLS OF THE WAY THE SEMPERS KEPT CHRISTMAS, AND OF A SAD FAREWELL.

THIS was quite a new experience for Asmus. He felt he should like to scream, to run out after his father and then to stay with him; but he stood there as if petrified, powerless to do or say anything. Hours passed before he ventured to address his mother.

"Is father coming back soon?"

"I don't know," said his mother, with a gloomy face.

"Will father ever come back?" asked Asmus, trembling all over.

That day there was no dinner at all. But just as it was beginning to get dark his father came home. Asmus rushed up to him and threw his arms round his legs.

Ludwig Semper brought bread and coffee home with him! He had not found any work though, but a friend of his, another cigar-maker, had lent him a *taler* (three shillings). That was a piece of luck! And, what was better still, his parents spoke kindly to one another again.

While they were eating—and they could eat, those two lads of eighteen and sixteen, Leonhard and Johannes—the Cloud-Shifter sailed in. They asked

him to join them, and he raised no objection; for he too was eighteen years old. In a few minutes, however, he began reciting Schiller's *Fall of Troy*, and when his voice gave out Ludwig Semper put his hand on his head and said :

“Infandum, regina, jubes renovare dolorem !”

and then he told them of how the King of Denmark, Frederick VII had paid a visit one Sunday morning to the Cathedral school in Schleswig, and how he, Ludwig Semper, had had to construe to the King some lines from the *Æneid*. His eyes shone as he recalled these things, and that evening was as beautiful and as calm as Peace.

But the borrowed taler melted away very quickly; the big boys, it is true, earned a couple of schillinge now and again; and now and again Ludwig Semper came across some one willing to lend him a little money; but they could find no permanent employment, and one morning a summons was handed in which the baker had taken out against them. Asmus caught the word “execution,” and it frightened him dreadfully. He had once seen a picture, in the *Gartenlaube* called “The Execution.” The bailiffs were carrying away the last bits of a poor family’s furniture; the father was sitting in sullen silence staring into vacancy, the mother was crying, and wiping her eyes with her apron, the children were watching the strange men with dilated eyes. And now all this was about to happen to them. “A lucky thing,” thought Asmus, “that it will soon be Christmas, for then everything is sure to be different. Then the Christmas-tree will be lit up, and there will be sugar things hanging on it. Mother will fry apple fritters again, and we shall have beefsteak for dinner !” But, strange to say, Christmas came nearer and nearer, and Asmus

could see no nudging and giggling going on, could see no one looking quietly happy. The others did not seem to be the least aware of the fact that Christmas was coming. The day before Christmas Eve he summoned up courage enough to ask his mother :—

“Has Ruppert brought the Christmas-tree yet?”

“Alas! my boy,” exclaimed his mother, almost crossly, “what are you thinking about? You must put the idea of a Christmas-tree out of your head this year.”

But he did not believe it. He knew all about that, she had said that on previous occasions. She had said it in quite a different way though, in quite a different way.

When he was alone with his father, he availed himself of the opportunity. He winked at him, and said, “I say, father dear, mother says we’re not going to have a Christmas-tree! We are though, aren’t we?”

Ludwig Semper jumped up, gave the boy’s head a hurried stroke, and said, just as hurriedly, “We shall see—we shall see!”

But even this year Christmas was not without its pleasures. On December 24 his father, his mother, and Johannes found a little work. On Christmas Eve the rest of them, looking very forlorn, were sitting round a table on which there were no signs of a meal. Leonhard was amusing himself in the way he loved best; he was drawing stately three-masters with swelling sails. No Christmas-tree had risen up out of the darkness, but on the table stood the big palace of “El Escorial.” True, Johannes had made it a long time ago with cardboard and gum arabic, but this evening Alfred had stuck a candle into it, and all the windows of the palace were lit up, as if for a fête, with this little bit of tallow-candle. Asmus

gazed fixedly at the light until he was so drowsy that he had to put his little arms on the table and go off to sleep. So he got through that Christmas Eve quite nicely.

The next day, Frau Rebekka was able to make some good strong soup at any rate, and when the room was filled with the fragrant aroma of meat and herbs, Henry the Navigator — for that was another name which Ludwig Semper had bestowed on Heinrich Moldenhuber, on account of his wind-filled coat-tails—appeared, and brought with him as a present for Asmus two back numbers of an illustrated newspaper which he had bought at the handbarrow. And then, when they actually discussed Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and Ludwig Semper began singing in his soft tenor, it seemed to Asmus that Christmas was really being kept in a quite satisfactory fashion. But something still more satisfactory was about to happen.

On Boxing Day a little thin man, whose left eye was winking merrily, came hopping in, and said in a thin, nasal voice :—

“Good-day, all of you.”

He was a cigar-maker too, or, as the Low German jargon of the trade has it, a *piependreher*, and, as is the case with all piependrehers, he was generally badly off, and sometimes very badly off. But when he was badly off he made jokes, and when he was very badly off he made very good jokes indeed. Fritz Dorn was his name, and he had made a rhyme about himself which he recited on occasions :

Gott schuf in seinem Zorn
Den edlen Fritz von Dorn
Und sprach : Du sollst auf Erden
Ein Piependreher werden !

One day he burst in upon Ludwig Semper, shouting:—

"I say, I've made a splendid arrangement! My landlord is a baker, and I'm going to take bread instead of rent!" And a little later, when, in spite of this most advantageous arrangement, he found on his return home from an expedition in search of work that his wife and child, and his few remaining sticks of furniture, had all been turned out into the street, he said:—

"Well, so this is where we are going to live now, eh?" And then, looking up at the sky, "The ceiling is rather high, ain't it?"

This excellent fellow, then, came to see the Sempers on Boxing Day, and shouted out as he entered the room—

"I say, I've been talking to Waldheim. He has work for you, as much as you can do."

When Asmus heard this, his first thought was—

"Oh, how nice. The bailiff won't come now."

Thus this Christmas ended up by being a very cheerful one after all.

But after a pause, during which he seemed to be deep in thought, the noble Fritz "von" Dorn, addressing Ludwig Semper, said—

"But, why ever do you make cigars, old fellow? That kind of work is good enough for a fellow like me, but for any one who knows as much as you do——"

This touched Frau Rebekka on the raw.

"Yes, Herr Dorn, just you rub it into him! The man is so clever, he knows English and French and Latin and Greek and Hebrew——"

"There, there, there!" cried Ludwig Semper.

"But do you imagine for an instant that I can make that man do anything else? How many times have I said to him, if there happened to be a post

vacant anywhere, 'Just you try for that!' Can you guess what his answer was? 'Oh, why should I bother myself about that?'"

Yes, why should Ludwig Semper bother about it? When he was making cigars he did the most glorious things imaginable in his dreams. When he was moving his lips violently, or biting his underlip, or casting his eyes up to the ceiling, or when he threw one leg over the other with a quick movement, he was giving sermons that he would have given if he had been a pastor; he was playing Faust as he would have played it had he been an actor; he was conducting the overture to *Leonora*; he was holding forth vehemently in Parliament against oppression; or, as a doctor, he was saying to a despairing patient: "Get up and walk." Who knows whether he would have been able to combine all these noble professions with any other occupation? He had applied for some post or other on two or three different occasions, but he had met with no success, and now why should he bother about anything else? He had work again! That very evening he read *Wallenstein's Camp* aloud to his family in the cheeriest fashion imaginable. When he read the lines:—

"'Tis a wretched, wretched life, God wot,
And yet for another I'd change it not,"

he threw up his white head—he was only forty-five years of age—with a gesture of enthusiasm, and Frau Rebekka listened to him with reverent pride. •

But it was high time that Ludwig Semper should find work. As Reinhold was gradually growing more intelligent, and was gradually giving up screaming, another little screamer naturally appeared upon the

scene, with powers that were quite fresh and unexhausted. He received the name of Adalbert, *i.e.* resplendent by patrimony, and for the time being he was the youngest.

The want of work had not had a good effect on the eldest of the Semper boys. He had made the discovery that walking in the fresh, open air is a more refreshing occupation than making cigars. Every morning the hour at which he made up his mind to take his seat at the cigar bench was a later one. On Mondays and Thursdays he could not make up his mind to it at any hour of the day. His mother lectured him about it enough, possibly rather too much; anyhow, it had no effect.

Ludwig Semper said nothing. But when Frau Rebekka worried her husband, and very rightly too this time, he made up his mind to a course of action. He took the one coat Leonhard possessed, locked it up in a cupboard, and put the key into his own pocket. Now we shall see if Leonhard will go for a walk. And that is just what Leonhard did. He threw his brother Johannes' coat surreptitiously out of the window, went out at the door, and down the stairs quite openly in his shirt-sleeves, put on the coat, and was off. That was a little too much even for his father. When his flighty son came home again there was a scene, and at the end of it Ludwig Semper said that if he would not work the sooner he went away altogether the better. Leonhard did not utter a word in reply, but in the evening he went out and did not come back that night. The day following, he stayed away too, and the night after that as well. His mother cried, his father kept on moving his lips the whole time he was working, Asmus could not summon up sufficient courage either to play or sing. When

he saw his mother's tears, his heart throbbed with a deep, dull sound like the lowest note of a viola. At last, on the fourth day, the Cloud-Shifter appeared and brought news. Leonhard, he told them, was working at another cigar-maker's. Moldenhuber had caught sight of him the previous evening in an inn, had gone in and had spoken to him. He was very merry, had played billiards, and had been much applauded for his witticisms. He was a witty boy, had a good voice, and could sing *La donna e mobile* with all the elegance of that man of the world, the Duke of Mantua.

Every one had been charmed with him, the Navigator informed them. His name was in every one's mouth the whole evening.

"It has always been so; people always like him," said Frau Rebekka, and she smiled almost happily.

But one place in the house was empty, and empty it remained, and think and say what you would, in that empty place sat a spectre. Leonhard Semper's sad career had begun.

CHAPTER X

TELLS HOW ASMUS FOUND A GREEN VALLEY IN THE
PLAIN, FELL IN LOVE TWICE RUNNING, AND HOW
JOHANNES GAVE HIM A NICKNAME.

WHEN the Sempers left the Düstere lange Balken, they moved to another part of Oldensund called "Am Rain" (On the Common). "Am Rain, am Rain" (on the Rhine, on the Rhine as pronounced), grew no grapes, only little, old, dirty* houses, which called themselves human habitations, and big, new, white-plastered blocks of dwellings, which also called themselves human habitations, and which were uglier still. In one of these new houses the Semper family was now living.

But when people of experience like Asmus Semper have to live in places like these it is their habit to go round the corner, and if you went round the corner of that street and under the first railway bridge, you found not only an extensive tract of country which was not yet built on, but you also found a mountain and a valley. Somewhere round about there was a depression in the ground about twenty feet deep. Now for a child of the plains a thing twenty feet in depth is a mountainous, dream-enwrapped world. At the bottom of this slope was a little meadow, and in this little meadow Silence grew on tall stalks, and when a solitary visitor came down to see her she

looked up at him with big bewildered eyes. This meadow he came across one Sunday afternoon, and it soon became his most intimate friend.

And, strange to say, outside it might be Tuesday, or Wednesday, or Friday, but when he went down into his meadow it was always Sunday there, holy Sunday. And the oftener he came the less surprised were the flowers. Indeed, when he sat down amongst them, they pressed up close to him, whispered to him, and told him fairy-tales about the songs of the bees and about water-sprites. Up above, on the edge of the plateau, the flowers and grasses grew straight up into the sky, and when your thoughts had climbed up the steep ascent, and had crept up to the top of the tallest bit of feathery meadow-grass, they reached Heaven, and could then walk about in Heaven's meadow. It was so exquisitely beautiful in this peaceful meadow that one day Asmus felt constrained to take with him seven of the little boys he played with in the street; he really could not keep his happiness to himself any longer.

"Oh, you must go there with me some day or other! It's jolly nice there, I can tell you."

But how odd! when the noisy troop dashed down the slope it was no longer Sunday in the meadow, but a quite ordinary Wednesday.

"Yes, it's jolly nice here, it's jolly nice here!" the others exclaimed. But Asmus grew more and more monosyllabic, and at last was quite silent. His meadow looked at him with sad and angry eyes. He had lost a paradise.

There was another paradise of quite a different kind, a boys' paradise situated between the little house opposite the block in which the Sempers were living. There was a large, flat, open space there, and

in it were about half a dozen little holes, which had first been made in it with the heel of a boot and then cleaned out and made smooth with the boys' caps. Often quite good caps, and sometimes even new ones. These were marble-holes, and the open space was the Monte Carlo of Oldensund. During play-time, and on holidays, all the owners of marbles in the village would assemble there, and Asmus, too, tried his luck at the game, but he never won anything at all. The habitual gamblers knew how, with a particular twist of the wrist, to give their marbles what the billiard player calls "screw," or, when they had grown sufficiently unscrupulous, they would allow their thumbs to "correct fortune" in such a clever way that an even number would roll into the hole, and people like Asmus, who stared into the hole instead of looking at the hands of the players, would leave the ground after a few minutes, ruined and heart-broken. Asmus's brother Alfred, however, amassed a fortune. He nearly always won, and developed into a marble Rothschild; he had jars and boxes full of this stony Mammon. But when he had gone on winning for too long the losers would set on him and try to thrash him. Asmus could not bear to see his brother hit, and used often to implore him to go away and not run the risk. But Alfred would tell him crossly to leave him alone, and so Asmus avoided the "links."

However, no human heart, as it wends its way through life, is left quite destitute of comfort, and he who is unlucky at play is lucky in love. This time Asmus's devotion was given to two little girls at the same time. These were two sisters of ten and seven years of age respectively, and their names were Mathilde and Fanny. The seven-year-old Fanny was the one he liked to play with best, but Mathilde he

preferred to look at. When he was engaged in looking at her he would say to himself, "Mathilde—Mathilde." That had such a soft, gentle, good sound. These little girls were alone all day and every day, for their mother went out washing. Asmus had seen her once, and had thought directly, "Her name must be Mathilde too." Asmus had never seen a father in the house.

He would sit quite still while the little girls were preparing their lessons, and he felt very hurt that he was not yet allowed to go to school. He had often begged his father to send him, but he always replied:—

"Yes, yes; soon, soon."

Once he heard Fanny reading the story of "Stupid Johnnie," and the concluding lines of the piece of poetry made him feel quite miserable:—

"John is no more little Johnnie;
Heavy cares oppress him,
Weeping, begging, night and morning,
Grief and want possess him.
'Why in youth was I so idle?
'Tis my fault I suffer.
Men, whatever my endeavour,
Call me John the Duffer.
Now at last 'tis forced on me,
I shall ever useless be.'"

That was what Asmus heard; he rested his round cheek on his fat little hand and gazed into a desolate future. Luckily this was followed by the bit about the kitten who put her little paw into the inkstand, and wrote the exercise that Johnnie had fallen asleep over. Then the future was forgotten, and all three burst out laughing and enjoyed the present.

Suddenly Mathilde gave a scream.

"Papa!" she exclaimed. They all looked towards the door. With fixed gaze, rough unkempt hair, his shirt torn open at the neck, they saw a tall, strong-

looking man in the dress of a carpenter leaning against the door-post. Hanging from one side of his mouth was a half-finished cigar, and he was muttering and grumbling to himself. Suddenly he looked up and caught sight of Asmus.

"Heh, heh! who's that small boy?" he shouted. "'Ave we got a little boy without me knowin' o' it? What's yer name, my son?" He reeled up to Asmus, who jumped on one side, quite horrified.

"You donkey you!" cried the drunken man. "You blockhead!"

He made another attempt to catch hold of Asmus; but Asmus, who had been making his way towards the door, hurried out, trembling all over. As soon as he was outside he felt terribly alarmed about his little friends.

"You've been cowardly again," he thought to himself. "You ought to have stood by Mathilde."

But then he told himself that he would not have been able to have got the better of such a big carpenter. He ran to his father.

"Father," he cried out, panting for breath, "the father of Fanny and Mathilde is there. I think he will hurt them. He's quite tipsy."

"O-oh!" said Ludwig Semper. He got up from his work very slowly, went downstairs very slowly, pretended he was looking for his Asmus, entered into conversation with the carpenter, gave him some cigars, and agreed so constantly with everything the talkative fellow said, that the latter very soon fell asleep upon the sofa. And then, very quietly and cautiously, Ludwig Semper stole back again to his own home, taking the two children with him.

Not until weeks after, when the sisters had assured him repeatedly that their papa had not been at home

for a long time, and that he only put in an appearance about once in every six months, did Asmus venture again into their rooms on the ground floor.

In the interim, however, he had been caught in the toils of a ballet-dancer. She was a very thin, lissom little girl of nine or ten years of age. Very young men are rather apt to fall in love with ladies somewhat older than themselves, more especially if the ladies are members of the ballet. She could not be said to have the smallest claim to prettiness, but for Asmus she was always surrounded by a sparkling, radiant atmosphere. She had taken part in the Christmas piece in the Hamburg Municipal Theatre, and she had danced on the stage. She had been in the place, she had played in the place to which he would never succeed in getting even as a spectator. If she had told him she had been in Heaven, and had seen bliss everlasting there, she would not have appeared to him more wonderful.

He used to contemplate her with reverent admiration, and did everything she asked him to do. She had him completely in tow, as only a nine-year-old little ballet-dancer can have a seven-year-old young man in tow. He used to push the swing for her without even expecting that she would push him in her turn. He used to act as horse to her cart, stepping, trotting, galloping until he had a stitch in his side; and once when the little artiste had been to fetch some milk, had spilt half of it on the pavement, and had asked him if she might not say that he had knocked up against her, he said "Yes" without a moment's hesitation.

One day, after Asmus had been serving her faithfully for some time, she went up to him, accompanied

by several of her playmates, and said she was about to reward him, and was going to give him something quite lovely. She presented him with a piece of folded paper, and told him to take it to a certain house in the Behrendorferstrasse. As soon as he got there he might open it, but not before. As happy as a king, Asmus ran to the house she had named, which was nearly a mile away, carrying the little parcel in his hand. With hands that trembled he undid the paper, and found in it—a piece of mud. He was terribly aggrieved and hurt. Now he had done with the ballet once for all. When the girls saw him again they smiled and giggled, but he ignored them completely. The man to run after a snake was certainly not Asmus Semper! He had too obstinate a nature for that! He could not bear malice, however, and three days later he was playing with her again, but the magic spell was broken, and the next time she wished to harness him to her cart, he said, without the least attempt at chivalry:—

“You can draw your cart yourself.”

He was usually not at all sensitive about being teased; quite the contrary. If his parents, or his brothers and sisters, or good friends of his teased him, he had a warm, comfortable feeling round his heart, and he felt very clearly and distinctly: “They are fond of me.” Sometimes he had actually a craving to be teased, and sometimes when he wanted to feel that they were fond of him, he would lay himself out to be teased. And just at that time something very nice happened to him. The Low German for “trundle” is “trudeln,” and because little Asmus had got so nice and fat that you might have rolled him all about the room with the greatest ease, Johannes called him one day: “Trudel.” “Trudel”—that was a delightful

name, and Asmus accepted it at once with a happy smile. And from that time his brothers and sisters, and his mother too, usually called him Trudel. His father alone, strange to say, never used the name. Little Asmus could have had no foreboding that this nickname was to be a source of misery to him in the future.

CHAPTER XI

HOW ASMUS GETS INTO WONDERLAND, AND AFTER THAT INTO A SHEEP-COTE.

WHEN the pavement in the street in which he lived was up, and a huge drain was being made, Asmus went on a voyage of discovery every day through black mould, through sand and clay. He thought it absolutely lovely to be allowed to sit down and work quite deep down in the ground, in the dark; and one morning, as he was craning his neck to watch the men letting down stones and mortar on long ropes, he felt it to be a very unpleasant interruption when his mother called him away from the interesting sight. What could they want him for? He reflected for a moment, and wondered whether he could have eaten up anything he had no right to; but his conscience was clear. As he entered the room they all stared at him. "Oh, oh," he thought, "I wonder if I've been naughty?" Then Ludwig Semper said, very slowly:—

"How would you like to go to the theatre with Johannes and Alfred this evening?"

Asmus opened his eyes wide and stared at his mother, his father, and his brother Johannes; and all he was able to utter was a threefold "Oh! oh! oh!" But when he perceived from his father's smiling face that he really meant it, he screamed with delight, "O-o-o-o-o-o-oh!" He hopped and skipped about the

room as if he had suddenly gone mad, flung his arms round his father's neck and kissed him, then round his mother's and kissed her, then round his brother's and kissed him. Soon after his mother gave him a piece of bread-and-butter; he took one bite, and then gave it back to her.

"I don't want it," he said.

About twelve o'clock his mother said:—

"It's going to rain. Perhaps it would be better for you to go to the theatre some other time."

Asmus looked at his father with such a miserable expression on his face that the latter winked at him immediately, as much as to say, "Don't you believe it, it's only a joke."

At dinner he pushed his plate away from him. Delight had taken away all his appetite. And he asked so many questions as to what it was like inside a theatre, what you did there, whether you were allowed to talk, if there were dolls there just like those in his theatre, if you could get out, at what time you were obliged to go out? etc. etc., that his mother exclaimed at last, "Just you stop talking about the theatre, my boy, or you won't get there at all!"

That had the desired effect. After that he was as quiet as a mouse.

The play was to begin at seven o'clock. The boys started off at four. They were going to the big town of Hamburg. That in itself was quite an event! Had it not been for the faithful hand of Johannes, Asmus would have been knocked down and run over ten times at least, for his eyes were always going in quite a different direction to his feet. Sometimes they mounted the walls of the tall houses right to the very top, at other times they crept stealthily into yawning, black vaults, then they glided off into

dimly-lighted side-streets, and fell into a dream under a solitary lantern; and anon they jumped into shimmering shops, and when the feet were seven steps farther on they would still be staring at a gigantic apple or at some bright-coloured toy; once they slid past a horrible big ghost that seemed to be coming towards them through the darkness and fog. His brothers told him it was St. Michael's Tower. When he stumbled he gave a shudder of fear, because he felt as if he had just fallen from the tower. All the streets were full of people hurrying along in opposite directions. "They are all happy," thought Asmus; "they are going to the theatre."

There was light everywhere—in the streets and in the houses too.

"That's because there's a play at the theatre to-night," thought Asmus. In an open square a brass band was standing and was playing a waltz.

"Yes, that's what it is," thought Asmus; "to-day is a holiday, and people are going to the theatre."

After they had been walking for about an hour, they came to a huge building, adorned with pillars and surrounded by flaring gas-jets. They went through a great, dingy-looking side door, and then up a staircase that seemed as if it would never come to an end. At last they stopped before a closed door. Here they found quite a number of people waiting—men, women, and children. They had to stand there for an hour. Asmus had no clear conception as yet as to how long an hour might be, more particularly an hour of waiting; consequently he thought undoubtedly at least a hundred times—

"Now—now they're going to open it."

But it was always a false alarm, or one that existed only in his imagination. People kept on

coming up and standing behind them. There was quite a crowd now. While they were waiting the people talked about all sorts of things, but the one who stood nearest to the door never took his hand off the handle. Particularly knowing ones pushed themselves forward very slowly, very cautiously, until a favourable moment arrived, and then they inserted an elbow, and forcing back the person in front of them, took his place. The one who had been thrust back protested, they wrangled and quarrelled, the shrill, scolding voice of a woman was heard, and mocking retorts and laughter came from below. For that whole live-long hour Asmus had nothing to look at but a big man in a wet waterproof. The air was so bad that he felt quite sick. But listen!—a bolt is being pushed back—another one—the door creaks—light can be seen through a chink, and then the crowd rushes in like wild beasts that have just been let loose, each struggling to get before the other, pushing back one, pulling another back by the tails of his coat, sticking his elbows into the chest of another. Alfred and Johannes had taken the little fellow in between the two of them, and they all three made a dash for the ticket-office. The tickets taken, they rushed upstairs again several steps at a time. All three of them managed to find seats in the front row of the gallery, just behind the rail—that was their reward.

Here they had to wait another hour. But there was no hardship about that. The things you could see from there were really quite worth the two schillings and a half, which was what a child had to pay, and you might consider that all that took place on the stage afterwards was given you for nothing. It was quite easy to spend one quarter of an hour

ASMUS SEMPER

looking at the curtain and at the proscenium, and at that mysterious place in front, just below the curtain, where four violoncellos and two kettledrums reposed; and another quarter of an hour gazing with astonished eyes at the enormous semicircle of stalls, though it did make you feel so giddy; and another quarter of an hour, and, oh dear! a much longer time still, at the chandeliers and at the paintings on the ceiling, which depicted such lovely floating forms that you felt you must be really in Heaven. And Asmus wandered about so long in Heaven that at last his neck began to ache. He had not nearly finished looking when the stalls and boxes began to fill. Well really! Those people down there were seating themselves on those red velvet chairs and in those golden boxes as if they had been made for sitting on and for nothing else! Just as you would sit down on a wooden chair at home, so they sat down, without more ado, on the most costly easy-chairs, without even bestowing a glance on them, without spreading anything over them first! He wondered what enormous sum of money it would cost to pay for a seat down below there, and he fancied that the people seated down there, or walking about and chatting with one another as if it were the most natural thing in the world, must most assuredly be all of them kings and queens.

There! What's that? The music was beginning. Asmus looked at his brother Johannes with an expression on his face that seemed to say:—

“How can they do it? How can there possibly be anything like that in this world?” There must have been something very unusual about that expression, for Johannes put his arm round Asmus and gave him a hug.

Then the curtain went up!

It was quite impossible for Asmus to grasp all that went on on the stage, as often as not he did not even hear the words at all, because his eyes were fastened so intently on the sunlit branches of a tree or on a misty blue distance. As often as not he saw nothing of what was taking place, because all his senses were concentrated on what one of the actors was saying. If all the spectators round about him had got up and gone away he would not have noticed it, for his mind and his senses were entirely occupied by the one thing. When he was grown up, Asmus could still see with a vividness that was almost tangible the huntsman (strange to say in front of the curtain) threatening the trembling little Snow-White with his knife, and letting her go at last after she had besought him to so imploringly that two great tears went rolling down little Asmus's face; then the seven dwarfs coming on to the stage one after the other in the most absurd way imaginable, according to their height, and singing such a funny song; then the poor little poisoned princess falling down and lying surrounded by a wreath of dark forest-greenery in a glass coffin, with the dwarfs watching beside her in the silent evening glow. Between the acts he asked his brother, in a very subdued little voice, if the people on the stage were real men and women, and if not what they were. And every time little Snow-White fell down lifeless, he asked most anxiously if she was really dead now.

After the pantomime came a whole opera, *i.e.* Auber's *Mason*. He did not understand much of it, but he held out to the end because of the music, and the next morning he asked his father:—

“Shall I sing you something from the *Mason*?”

"Yes, do," said Ludwig Semper, and Asmus sang :—

"To work alone is very dreary,
Work demands that we should share it;
Faithful comrades hast thou many,
Lose not courage, bravely face it,
Faithful friends by you will stand."

And the walking-stick trumpeter and the cigar-box lyrist, Asmus Semper, added the *Mason* to his répertoire.

Ebbing slowly, very slowly for many a week, the golden wave flowed on which this event had raised in the soul of little Asmus. Then it was joined by another wave, but that was not a golden one. If a cigar-manufacturer took his work away from, or refused to give any more work to, a home-worker, either because he was not satisfied with the cigars he had made, or because he had too much manufactured tobacco on hand, that was called in the language of the guild being "chucked out."

One Saturday evening Ludwig Semper came home as usual laden with boxes and seroons, but there was no tobacco in them.

"What's up?" asked Rebekka Semper in dismay.

"He has chucked me out," said Ludwig Semper.

Then Asmus ran up to his father in terror, examined his coat all over, and asked :—

"Are you hurt much?"

Though they were in such trouble Ludwig and Rebekka Semper could not help laughing at this literal interpretation of the expression. But from that moment Asmus disliked all manufacturers intensely, and was convinced that they were all very horrid, bad people.

His parents' laughter was very faint, and its duration very short. They had owed the money for the taxes

for so long, that the collector would not wait any longer and put in the bailiff. Asmus was seized with a panic again, for he imagined the bailiff would take everything away, would be cross to his parents, and perhaps might even ill-treat them. But he turned out to be a very nice, polite man, who stuck tickets on to a table, a couple of chairs, and a little cupboard, and thanked Ludwig Semper very politely when he offered him a cigar. In a few days the table, the chairs, and the little cupboard were carried out and driven away.

With the very best intentions in the world it was quite impossible to take anything more away from the Sempers. Asmus was glad that the affair had gone off so well, and as there was much more space in the room now, and it had quite a different look, he began to think the execution had been quite an interesting event. And his eyes would go wandering off cheerfully and inquisitively into the empty corners, into which his father would gaze with a look of worry in his eyes, and his mother with tears of vexation and resentment in hers.

When the landlord heard of the execution he immediately gave the Sempers notice to quit. But as he had confidence in Ludwig Semper's honesty, and the law would not permit of his taking anything else away from him, he allowed him to depart in peace though he had not paid his rent. Up to this time the Sempers had had a whole floor to themselves, but after this move they had a whole house. True, the flat had contained three good-sized rooms and a real kitchen as well, whereas the house had only two little rooms and a loft in it. Judging from outside appearances you might have mistaken the house for a sheep-cote, and yet in a way it was really bigger and far grander than the

three good-sized rooms in the block of dwellings in the "Rain," for to it belonged limitless fields, that stretched far away to the horizon, broad hedge-bordered lanes which faded away into the evening glow, and a black pond so deep that no one had ever succeeded in sounding it. This house was situated in that part of Oldensund which goes by the name of "The Holstenloch."

CHAPTER XII

TELLS HOW ASMUS RECEIVED INSTRUCTION FROM THE
SIBYL ADOLFINE, AND HOW THE GREAT PAN
FRIGHTENED HIM.

THE Düstere lange Balken and the Holstenloch were situated at opposite ends of the civilised world. In the meadows and lanes surrounding the Holstenloch foxes and hares bid one another good-night; and one morning the innkeeper, who lived a little lower down the road, and at whose house the civilised world commenced, had a little fox in a cage, which had been caught in a trap during the night. The children stood all round about it and stared at it, and made wise remarks anent the little prisoner who was running to and fro with dubious gaiety.

The Sempers were not the only people stationed at this outpost; three or four other families dwelt in the wilderness, and amongst these was the family of their landlord, Herr Moses, who was also the ground landlord of the Holstenloch. His house, which looked like a superior kind of cow-shed, was situated on the road itself, just before you came to the Sempers' house. Herr Moses was so ugly that it was impossible to tell whether he belonged to the Aryan or Semitic race; it is highly probable that either his father or grandfather had been baptized, and his only child, Adolfine, had

certainly been instructed in the doctrines of Christianity and had been confirmed.

When the little hump-backed, bandy-legged Herr Moses came to the Sempers' house to see to the stove, which smoked frantically, Asmus gazed at him with horror and dread. He could not understand in the least why the little monster looked at him so threateningly out of the corners of his eyes while he was making his pots. He even went the length of lifting his mud-covered fist, shaking it at Asmus, and calling out: "Just you wait a bit!" as he looked out of the window with the most horribly cross expression on his face. Asmus looked towards the window, but no one was to be seen. It was not until he saw his father glancing up at him with a smile on his face that it dawned on him that the threat was meant for him, and that Herr Moses was having a joke with him. And then, when he presented him with a schilling, Asmus felt quite sure that in spite of his awful squint Herr Moses must be a splendid man.

The little iron stove continued to show how much character it possessed by persisting in smoking, but when a man is in arrears with his rent he cannot say much, more particularly when he has a wonderfully patient landlord like Herr Moses. Asmus never saw the latter again; no one really knew what Herr Moses did with himself and what his occupation was. Some people said there was a Frau Moses, and asserted that they had seen her repeatedly; others were convinced there was no such person in existence. The only human being who was ever seen going in and out of the house, and was to be heard moving about in it occasionally, was a girl of about thirteen called Adolfine, whose appearance led you to believe that her mother could not have been famous for her beauty. She only

turned up at school at long intervals, and then her visits were fleeting ones; neither her inclination nor her talents acting as an incentive. She was never to be seen playing with other children; Asmus was the only one who seemed to have any attraction for her, and him she treated in a motherly fashion. On warm evenings he would sit down beside her in the doorway, and she would tell him about the lights which were to be seen at night dancing about over the black pond close to the deserted dye-works, and that no one had ever found out how deep the pond was, and that people thought that it must reach down to the other side of the earth. She told him, too, about the tailor, Jensen, drowning himself and his little son there, because his wife spent all his earnings in drink. When it was storming and snowing outside, Asmus would sit with her in the kitchen, which had evidently never been cleaned out within the memory of man, and which was as full of odds and ends, and as full of dust and smoke as the laboratory of an alchemist.

Crouching by the hearth like a sibyl, by the light of a little, odorous, petroleum lamp, she told him how the night before her brother's death there had come three knocks at the window, and that even now you could hear some one knocking occasionally. She always thought it must be her brother, but she was much too frightened to go out. She told him that on New Year's Eve horses and cows were able to speak, and that then they told one another who was going to die during the coming year.

At times her superstitions and belief in ghosts were too much even for little Asmus, and then, with his head resting on both his little fists, he would say: "I don't believe that." Then she would get spiteful, would open her big mouth, scold him like

the little shrew that she was, and turn him out of the house. But when he believed what she told him she would share her daily portion of buckwheat cakes with him; and he would eat them with the greatest avidity, and would imagine he was eating something very choice, though those his mother made were infinitely nicer. Children always like things cooked by other people—even though the salt and flavouring has been forgotten—much better than the food they get in their own homes.

Asmus had straightway made up his mind that he would go on an exploring expedition to the deserted dye-works and the unfathomable pond. If only Winter had not been such a hard, cold, unkind fellow, had not stung his toes and cut his fingers, tweaked his ears and pinched his nose, until he began to fancy he had no nose left. But his sister Adelheid's mistress had given her a thick coat and a pair of boy's boots, and she brought them home in triumph. Frau Rebekka Semper was a perfect genius at cutting up things and adapting them,—she had once made a silk blouse for herself out of an old umbrella cover,—and now out of this big coat she made one that fitted Asmus to perfection.

One afternoon, Asmus was playing in the street, just outside their front door, and was making a kennel for the fox he intended catching. He had on his beautiful new coat and the boots which were more than sufficiently large for him, and all at once he thought: "You must go and have a look at those dye-works." He put one leg slowly in front of the other, and very soon he found that walking was not such a very difficult matter after all. Winter proved to be a warm, kind, gentle man, instead of the cold, unkind one he had expected him to be. He had

spread a thick, soft covering over the lanes, and had wrapped all the hedges up so snugly in white fur that you felt you were in a secluded room in the silent winter world, and that nothing could harm you. The lane Asmûs was walking along kept calling out to him enticingly: "Come on, come on!" and the farther he went the softer and more seductive became the voice. The silver flowers on the hoar-frost-covered birch-trees called out: "Come on, come on!" while white umbels dropped noiselessly from them. The sun, red as fire, peered through the sparkling tangle of the bushes, and called out enticingly: "Come on, come on!" In the little apartment, in which your heart was throbbing so joyously, winter was not cold at all, quite the contrary; it was really warmer and cosier than it had ever been in summer.

At last he saw the pond close in front of him. Very cautiously he went up to the brink of it, looked timidly in, and thought: "Unfathomable—unfathomable!" And his soul shivered at the thought; for to drown in an unfathomable pond seemed to him to be a ghastly fate. You could never get out again, never! And he stared into it for a while as though he fancied he might be able to catch a glimpse of the tailor and his son; but there was nothing to be seen. So on he ran, Winter enticing him. Silence even was enticing him now—broad, spacious Silence—saying to him in a voice as soft as a snowflake, "Come on, do come on!" And now he was so near to the sun that if he crossed that one field he would stand beside it. He gazed dreamily into its tremulous, red glow. What is that?—what is that? That spiteful, malicious Silence is attacking him from behind, and gripping his neck with long icy fingers. He starts violently,

turns round quickly, and sees that he is quite alone in the world. "I must go home," he thinks, and he begins to walk back the way he had come. But all at once he comes to two lanes. Which of them ought he to take? He makes up his mind in an instant, and goes towards the left. On and on he goes, but the house of his parents will not come. Then he quickens his pace, and at last breaks into a run, and full of mute terror gives no thought to the way he is going. So fast does he run that he stumbles and falls. He picks himself up again, brushes the snow off his clothes, and sets off running again. But the snow, which had settled on his fingers as it fell, melts, and his little fingers become quite stiff, and begin to tingle and to hurt him. Now the lane divides again. He looks all about him, and then breaks out into a terrible howl, and, howling, he goes towards the right this time.

Trapp trapp, trapp trapp, trapp trapp.
And all the time he goes on howling—

"Hou—ou—ou—ou—ou—ou—ou—ou."

What's that?—a creature dashes across the lane, a long, thin creature; it is a weasel; but he does not know what it is. He stops suddenly, and looks after it with dilated eyes. Then he starts off running again, howling—

"Hou—ou—ou—ou—ou—ou—ou—ou."

And Asmus Semper and this his story would probably have ended prematurely in the snow if,—just as sometimes in our journey through life we suddenly see deliverance coming round the corner towards us,—if a long form with flying coat-tails had not come in the same sudden way round the corner towards Asmus. The form was shouting and brandishing its arms; but as its face was turned

away from the scanty light it looked like a black man, and Asmus thought: "That is Adolfine's dead brother!" He wheeled round and ran away as if he had gone mad all of a sudden. But he heard his own name. "Asmus, Asmus!" some one was yelling out—and in a voice that was familiar to him too. He ceased running, looked round, and saw the Cloud-Shifter leaping and bounding towards him.

"Asmus boy, you young rascal you! What are you up to? Wherever have you been?"

"I don't know," said Asmus.

"What are you doing with that hammer?"

"What hammer?" asked Asmus, the great tears still rolling down his face. Then he noticed that he really was holding a hammer in his hand, the hammer he had been using when he had been making the kennel for the fox, and which he had kept tight hold of during the whole of his journey. The Cloud-Shifter told him the whole family were out looking for him.

"Is mother awfully cross?" asked Asmus.

"No, I don't think so," said his friend in order to pacify him.

"Come in with me, do please," said Asmus; "then she won't do anything to me. She never beats me when visitors are there."

Henry the Navigator promised he would; but there was really no need. Rebekka Semper scolded Asmus, it is true, but as she was laughing with joy all the time it was a poor sort of scolding.

CHAPTER XIII

ASMUS BECOMES A LANDED PROPRIETOR, AND THE
NAVIGATOR DISEMBARKS A MOST FASHIONABLY-
ATTIRED PASSENGER.

THE Cloud-Shifter had a habit of always bringing something with him when he came to see the Sempers, and this time he brought—a new ideal. Henry the Navigator had made up his mind that he would like to be a real sailor—that he could wish for nothing better than to sail through the Tropics—to gaze at the primeval forests of Brazil—the delta of the Ganges—ha! or to winter amid the ice around the Pole and hunt white bears—ha!

He had been on two long voyages lately: a book his vessel, its leaves his sails, imagination his ocean! It was, therefore, chiefly from the point of view of an explorer and a traveller that the seafaring profession presented itself to his mind—from the point of view of one who traverses the oceans for the pleasure of the thing. Johannes considered the reasons he gave for his decision absolutely convincing, and, provided they could obtain the consent of their parents, the two boys decided to hire themselves out at the next opportunity and to go to sea as cabin-boys.

It chanced, however, that somewhere about this time Johannes Semper went for a sail, and, that, while he was on board, one side or other of the vessel was

always up in the air, so that his spirits became very depressed and his heart longed to be relieved of its burden; also that Heinrich Moldenhuber read a law case in a newspaper in which there was an account of how a cabin-boy had been driven to his death by barbaric treatment, and from which he was able to glean a good deal of information as to the work and life in general of a cabin-boy. It is not to be inferred that these two events had the effect of discouraging these two young fellows; but their ideal became slightly tarnished, so to speak, and young men of seventeen and eighteen years of age have so many brilliant ideals that they do not care to be bothered with a tarnished one for even twenty-four hours.

Yes, the Cloud-Shifter invariably brought something with him, but this Christmas it was a very special something that he brought to the Sempers' house. In other respects Christmas had not been a particularly festive one this year. True, Ludwig Semper had found work again, but it was not very remunerative work; true, the candles had been lit on a little tree on which two or three gilded walnuts had been hung, but the tree stood on a narrow little table that had to be propped up against the wall to prevent it from falling over. The presents were not remarkably brilliant ones, and Asmus would have had to content himself with a *Life of Garibaldi*, which he thought frightfully dull, if the wife of one of their neighbours who hawked toys about had not had a manor house left on her hands. This beautiful house, with its modern outbuildings and stables, its large stock of cattle, five serfs, and any quantity of arable and pasture land, she allowed Ludwig Semper to have for six schillinge. With those six schillinge and what he gave for the Christmas-tree Ludwig Semper might

have had the rickety table repaired; but this man had a moral defect—a defect common to all those who have been breathed upon by the same spirit. Even in times of poverty and want these people cannot manage to do entirely without the bright things of life. They ask Fate to give them bread, but they require poetry of her as well, and if she refuses them that she may keep her bread.

The manor was such a big one that on Christmas Eve it produced enough food for the hearts of the whole Semper family. When the hens fell on their noses, as if they were going to peck up seeds, they were all delighted; they all laughed at the lord of the manor, whose head was like a dumpling with raisins stuck in to represent the eyes and nose. When it was all set up it covered the whole of the table, and looked like a brightly-coloured, sunshiny bit of the world, where everybody was comfortable and happy. “*Beatus ille*,” recited Ludwig Semper:—

“*Beatus ille, qui procul negotiis
Ut prisca gens mortalium,
Paterna rura bobus exeroet suis
Solutus omni fœnore!*”

“What’s the meaning of that?” asked Asmus eagerly, and his father construed it into language a child could understand, into the language of his own young days.

They had a little punch too, that evening. Asmus was allowed to take just one little sip; Alfred was allowed to take a big sip; Johannes had a whole glassful to himself; Leonhard—he was not there.

But the trump card, as has already been stated, was played in the afternoon of Christmas Eve by the Cloud-Shifter. The whole family were gathered

together, including the girls—Marianne, who was always laughing, who screamed with delight every ten minutes, and Adelheid, who was rather snappy, and was always saying that nothing would ever induce her to take a husband. The “resplendent” Adalbert was present both in mind and body; he lay in his cradle and took note of everything with his eyes, though he made no remarks because he was busy sucking the head of a wooden elephant, and Reinhold was beating an accompaniment to the whole thing on a drum.

All at once the door opened, and the sailer was seen entering the harbour, and on the starboard side was a nice-looking and, in a certain sense, fashionably attired young gentleman, and the fashionably attired young gentleman was Leonhard Semper.

Leonhard Semper was a successful man. Gifted as he was in manifold directions, he had attained to a certain artistic perfection in making cigars. His hand was so sensitive that he was able to turn out a cigar of exactly the right weight, not half a gramme heavier or lighter than it ought to be, and he could twist the point so that it looked as if it had just come from a turner’s bench. He was equal to the very finest work, and was in consequence much sought after, and, if he did not go on the spree for two or three days, he often earned in one week thirty *kurant mark* or more.

Now an ambitious little scheme had entered Leonhard’s head: namely, that for once in his life he would be very fashionably dressed!

Consequently, he bought himself a top-hat, a very modern top-hat, with a coquettishly turned-up brim; then he was measured for a pair of boots, and they fitted his little feet like a glove; he ordered a black suit with a white piqué waistcoat, and with this he wore an embroidered shirt-front with a turned-down

collar, and cuffs that were so up to date that they covered quite half his hands. To this he added an umbrella that you could fold up until it was almost as thin as a rapier, and then the young masher was complete. He did not look in the least like a cigar-maker, but like a tenor from Magdeburg or Posen, and it was in this guise that he appeared in the Holstenloch.

Mother Rebekka had been more violent in abuse of her prodigal son than any one else, but as soon as she caught sight of him her heart melted into a flood of tenderness. She kissed him, she patted his cheeks, she touched the top-hat with her finger in shy admiration, and she stroked the piqué waistcoat. Father Ludwig was pleasant, certainly, and did not make an unkind or harsh remark; but the bridge that had connected his kind heart with that of his son's had been broken in two, and though both of them worked away at it shyly, they never succeeded in putting it together again.

It is due to Leonhard to mention that he played the part of *grand seigneur* during the whole of his visit, and very well too. He presented Asmus with two schillinge and Alfred with four, and he invited his sisters, his brother Johannes, and the Cloud-Shifter to accompany him to a concert in Hamburg—he would treat them, he said. They accepted his offer with glee, but when he extended his invitation to his parents, Ludwig Semper declined with a smile and a wave of the hand, and Frau Rebekka did the same. No doubt they both thought of the contents of their wardrobe, which were not exactly suitable for festive surroundings, but it was no difficult matter for them to deny themselves the pleasure. Six happy children—how could they possibly ask for more in one day!

"It's time we started then," said Leonhard, drawing out his watch.

"He has got a watch! he has got a watch!" screamed Asmus; and then all his brothers and sisters, his mother, and the Cloud-Shifter stood round their opulent visitor to look at the glittering pinchbeck object. He had to open it to let Asmus listen to its ticking, and to show him how it was wound up with a key.

At last, laughing and talking merrily, the troop of young people set off; the old people stood at the door and watched them for some time, and Alfred and Asmus thought of all the glorious things those lucky ones were going to see.

But Frau Rebekka had taken her eldest son on one side, and had begged him to come to see them very often, and to be a good boy and very steady and industrious. Leonhard promised to do everything she asked him, as if it were quite an easy matter, and then, feeling very much relieved that that was over, he joined the others.

"He's as good as gold, really," she said to her husband. "He is still very generous."

"H'm!" said Ludwig.

"He is thoughtless," said the mother, "but his heart's all right."

"Yes, yes, no doubt—h'm!" said Ludwig.

CHAPTER XIV

TREATS OF A BEGINNING THAT WAS DIFFICULT AND OF
ONE THAT WAS EASY, AND OF QUIET SOCIAL
GATHERINGS.

SOON after Christmas, Asmus succeeded at last in forcing his father to do a little towards his education. He was desirous of learning to write, and Ludwig Semper actually consented to give his son some instruction! A copy-book, a pen-holder, some nibs and a bottle of ink were procured. Asmus trembled all over with joyful excitement. But his father had not been trained in the methods of Pestalozzi any more than had Alfred, and because the alphabet begins with A, Ludwig Semper must needs begin his writing lesson with A, and with a capital A into the bargain. If every beginning is difficult, the beginning of the alphabet is more especially so, and the capital A is a most malicious invention! Then, to make matters worse, Ludwig Semper set Asmus a Schleswig A to copy, one of those in fashion at the commencement of the nineteenth century, and the thing started off with something resembling a small shell, in which the eyes and fingers of the little scholar lost their way as in a labyrinth. And then, to his mind, it was particularly mean behaviour on the part of the steel nib that it would always insist

in bending to one side, instead of bending about in every direction like a paintbrush, and the ink had a sly, mean way, too, of creeping up his fingers higher and higher. The first row or so looked like a magnificent menagerie of curious monsters. Asmus ventured very timidly to ask his father's opinion of them. The latter shook his head slowly and repeatedly, and made another beautiful capital A for his son to copy. There was not the least doubt that Ludwig Semper could write, but the point was that his son could not manage to as yet. Asmus then gripped the penholder with all his might and main, as if it were a brass stylus and the copy-book a block of granite; in a fury the nib spluttered and screeched and spat out black gall in every direction, and at last it thought: "There now. I'll strike work altogether very soon!" —said "Crack! snap!" in a most impertinent tone of voice, and snapped in two. Asmus was not a little frightened; for a nib of that description cost two *pfennige* (one farthing). He took a fresh one up as noiselessly as possible, and then held the penholder in the most gingerly fashion, so that the nib moved over the paper with the utmost gentleness, and at last he succeeded in producing something that bore some sort of resemblance to an A. Alfred jeered at it, it is true, and recited a doggerel about pot-hooks and hangers, but Ludwig Semper said, with a smile: "Not so bad!" and went on to the capital B.

It did not often happen that when Ludwig Semper had said A he would say B as well; and it was only his son Asmus who could induce him to go as far as that, and on this occasion there was no getting him to say C. He had far too many other worries. Every Saturday when he took the cigars to the manufacturer he was obliged to walk about five miles, and when he

came home laden with meat and flour and coffee and a picture-sheet for Asmus, he was not burdened with much ready money as well. But yet he always came in with a cheerful face; and in the evening would sing and read *Faust* to them, because for the next three days he would be free from anxiety; but by Tuesday or Wednesday, his cheery, hopeful expression would gradually change into a melancholy, anxious one. And one day the fateful sentence was pronounced: "Asmus must come and work too." His mother had often inquired crossly, why that fat healthy boy was not set to work; the other children had begun when they were much younger. She couldn't imagine what her husband saw in the urchin, he treated him as if he was a golden apple.

And at last Ludwig Semper did order his Asmus to sit at the tobacco-bench. You could see how intensely it pained him to do it. If it had only been feasible he would very much have preferred to have done a little more work himself, but it was not. Count Nevers and Wetter vom Strahl, music-maker and Spring's playmate though he was, Asmus had to work. And, of course, he was quite delighted to try a new kind of entertainment. It was his duty to prepare the inner wrappers for the cigars. He had to split the centre rib or stem of the tobacco-leaves with his finger-nail, then to strip off the lower half of the stem, and to place the leaves which had been thus prepared one on the top of the other. It took Asmus but three minutes to learn how to do this, and he was very proud of being allowed to sit at the same table with the grown-ups, and to be at last on an equality with full-grown and sensible people. Strange to say, the beginning was very easy in this case, quite child's play, but after a while, instead of becoming easier the

work became difficult, very difficult indeed! A long and bitter struggle had commenced.

If you had not too much of it, if you stripped off about seven ribs,—not seven hundred,—it was quite a pleasant occupation to prepare tobacco, and it was a delightful thing to be a working-man too—for one day, but not day after day. The worst part of the whole affair was that there were windows in the room. Through these windows you could see bushes covered with thick snow, and those bushes were looking so quietly happy in their pretty attire they didn't even so much as move a twig or a spike for fear of losing their costly covering, and Asmus's eyes looked quietly at them as they stood there so quietly, and his hands were every bit as quiet as the bushes. Then he gave a violent start, because his mother called out: "Bestir yourself, youngster!" and he stripped several more leaves, six, seven, or even eight, perhaps. Then he looked out of the window again, over the tops of the bushes, to a spot in the empty space where the boys of Oldensund were skating, or rushing down a slope in little sleighs which they called "kreeken," at such a pace that steam was coming out of their mouths and noses. Alas! he had no skates; they were fabulously dear; he had not even a "kreeke," a thing you could knock together out of three boards—that is to say if you happened to have any boards. Then he went on looking through the window for skates for so long that his father said: "Off with you then!" And deep in thought though Asmus was, he heard those words at once, and, no sooner had he heard them, than he was out of doors. And, sad to say, when he had once grasped the fact that by being idle man can obtain freedom, he was mean enough to hasten the process by being more indolent still.

By forcing Asmus to do monotonous work you could quite upset his temper. He had an innate aversion to cleaning boots, or knives and forks, or to peeling potatoes. He did not so much mind shelling peas, picking over bilberries, stripping currants and things of that sort, that is to say provided no one worried him while he was working. But if, while he was cleaning knives, any one irritated him he could be a little fiend. One day, when Alfred took it into his head to jeer at him while he was engaged in this critical occupation, his blood—according to his mother's theory—rose to his head in a moment, and he threw the fork which he had in his hand at his brother. He only intended to hit him with the handle, but the fork interpreted Asmus's wish in a different fashion, and stuck its prongs into the enemy's arm. Alfred replied to this enforced vaccination by throwing an iron marble at his brother which hit him on the forehead and caused it to swell up considerably. But in the evening of the very same day they played at "Old Maid" together again.

But it was not until the sunbeams were released once more from Winter's bonds, and went rushing past the little window of the workroom day after day, that Asmus learnt what this work of preparing tobacco really meant to him. Sunshine, Spring sunshine! It gives fresh glitter to the rich man's gold, but to the poor man it is gold itself; it intensifies the happiness of the happy man, but to the man bereft of everything it is happiness itself. People who are rich and happy have no conception of the real value of sunshine, they are not aware that it is food, clothing, and dwelling, and that even though it bestows not so much as a crumb of bread upon the hungry man, it is friendship and love to him. Sunshine clasps in a

warm embrace the weary and heavy-laden, and whispers to him: "You are not forgotten! The Weltgeist knows and remembers you."

"Sunlight sweet, whose all embracing pity
Gladdens lane and city!
Thou hast blest mine eyes again,
Sunlight sweet—thou lightener of pain,"

a poet has sung, and it is true. It is the last bit of happiness left to the poorest and the most forsaken; to him whom life has deprived of everything else, a bit of happiness that he can never lose, unless he be condemned to pine in a dungeon. Death even does not treat all men equally, sunshine alone does that. Therefore sunshine is the poor man's chief regalement.

The little cigar-maker's assistant, who in the winter had sat there as quietly as the snow-covered bushes, now quivered and twisted about like a leaf in the Spring wind, like a sunbeam on flowing water, and oftener than before Ludwig Semper would say, with a sigh: "Be off with you then!" Asmus used to feel just a little ashamed at leaving his father in the lurch in that way; but Spring and Freedom were stronger than the sense of shame. He would go skipping along the self-same lanes in which he had lost himself in the winter, he would stand by the unfathomable pond and in front of the deserted dye-works; but now he did not feel frightened at all. In Spring and in Summer the world is one large, brightly-lighted room. And he gazed again at the meadows and fields with that sense of intimate acquaintance that had been characteristic of him from the days of his earliest childhood. In his eyes, every little bit of the world wore a different aspect from the other, each one had its own particular light, its own particular

sound. He had only to twist his head round just a little wee bit, and take one step forwards, to be in quite a different world. He saw gods in the lanes and human beings in Heaven; songs and stories in the clouds and the trees. In one place he saw Joseph and his brethren tending their cattle, in another Cinderella would be standing under a tree; on the far-distant horizon Herr Schnede would pass by, as in former years, with his ease-loving donkey; and anon he would stand still, and feel the sweet tones of Tamino's flute winding themselves round his heart. He would often steal along on tiptoe quietly and softly, as if he feared to awaken himself and the world, as if he were afraid of frightening the Wolf and the Fox who were trotting along over there near the wood, engaged in an animated conversation about the cakes the Farmer's Wife had made.

CHAPTER XV

TELLS HOW ASMUS MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF HERR
BELLIÈVRE, AND HOW IN CONSEQUENCE HE
BECAME A REBEL AND A BRIGAND.

ONE day, while Asmus was sauntering about in the lanes, he made a friend, and this friend was Christel Bellièvre. Christel Bellièvre was a cigar-maker of about fifty years of age. Oldensund swarmed with cigar-makers. He was a Frenchman from Alsace, had a mass of curly black hair only slightly touched with grey, a thick black moustache, and might decidedly have been called a handsome man, in spite of the fact that he wore the same coat from one year's end to the other. Christel was a philosopher of the school of Diogenes; his wants were limited to a sufficiency of bread, meat, and *schnaps*. Everything else he was quite willing to dispense with, provided he might contemplate nature in peace and quietness. For four days of the week he worked regularly and industriously; on the three remaining days he would start off very early in the morning with a flat bottle of clear, transparent cumin-brandy in the pocket of his threadbare coat, and then would wander with bare head out into the fields. He would not return until the evening, when he would bring with him a huge nosegay of flowers and grasses. Whether he really possessed a hat or not was a moot point; the school-

children had their doubts, and used to tease him occasionally about it, much to the annoyance of Asmus; in his opinion it was your duty to be more than usually polite to a man from a foreign country. He would contemplate him with a curious reverence, as if he were a superhuman being, quite different from ordinary people. He had heard them say at home that the French were a very polite nation. "Now, I will show him," thought Asmus, "that the Germans are polite too." So one day when the Diogenes of Oldensund was sauntering along, absorbed in thought, Asmus summoned up all his courage and called out:—

"Bonjour, monsieur!" His father had taught him that.

"Bonjour, monsieur!" the wonderful man retorted pleasantly; "est-ce que vous parlez français?"

No, that Asmus could not do, so the conversation had to be continued in German. But henceforward, whenever he caught sight of the philosopher coming along, even though he was some distance away, Asmus would call out:—

"Bonjour, monsieur; comment allez vous?"

"Fort bien, mon ami, fort bien!" the philosopher would shout out in reply, and would beckon to him energetically; and then, when Asmus had joined him, they would converse in German.

Christel Bellièvre knew where birds'-nests were to be found, and he would lift up his little friend and let him peep into them; he understood the ways of blackberries so well that at the end of the summer Asmus was able to take home whole capfuls of them, and when autumn came he proved himself to be a specialist in hazel nuts. In fact, he guided the love of Nature, which was inherent in Asmus—who, however,

always winged his way swiftly along above things—to the actual facts of Nature. But Asmus never became an adept at finding either birds'-nests or hazelnuts; the most he could manage was to gather a few blackberries when they were almost dropping into his mouth. But the friendship bore fruit of another kind. When, with a great deal of ingenuity and thought, the Frenchman was arranging the flowers he had gathered into an enormous nosegay, or was contemplating the sky through his green bottle, making a clucking sound the while, Asmus would consider him quietly out of the corner of his eye.

"He has five fingers on his hand, too," he would think. "And they're just like ours, too. And when he swallows his throat jumps up and down, just as ours does. His eyes and his nose are exactly like ours, too. French people's ears are not quite the same though." But when Christel had emptied his bottle, and had stretched himself out on the grass for a long, long rest, the distillatory power of the midday sun would cause the spirit within him to expand, and then he would grow dreamy, and with melancholy pathos would repeat to himself over and over again the introductory sentence to *Emile*:

"Tout est bien, sortant des mains des choses; tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme."

Asmus asked him what that meant, and, looking at him significantly, Christel said:—

"Everything, my son, is good when it leaves the hands of the Creator; everything—mark that, my son—*everything* degenerates in the hands of man."

Asmus did not quite understand it, but he considered it very good, because it had such a good sound, such a forcible, decided sound. And the *Marseillaise*, of which he knew the whole of the first

strophe by heart, though he did not understand a word of it, gave him greater pleasure still. Ludwig Semper was not a little surprised when one day his little son came in at the door singing:—

“Allons, enfants de la patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!”

But when the youngster went on singing, Ludwig Semper's eyes flashed brightly, and father and son sang together as if they only possessed one mouth between them:—

“Aux armes, citoyens!
Formez vos bataillons!
Marchons, marchons,
Qu' un sang impure
Abreuve nos sillons!”

And then Ludwig Semper shouted with laughter.

But Frau Rebekka set her foot down, and said she would not have Asmus singing the *Marseillaise*, if the police were to hear him he would most certainly be popped into prison. Now as a German child Asmus had considerable respect for the police, and had rather a horror of them as well. In the Kurze Elend he had once or twice caught a glimpse of Herr Lüthje in the distance, and had felt very frightened. Herr Lüthje was a blue and red man, with shining buttons, a sword, and a thick bamboo stick of a bright yellow colour. The young folk of Oldensund had composed a four-lined doggerel in his honour:—

“Lüthje mit den Eiergeel
Sleit de Kinner gar to veel;
Alltoveel is ungesund
Lüthje is'n Schinnerhund.”

From that time the word “police” always meant for Asmus a man who walks about the street on the

look-out for children to whom he can give a thrashing. And the word "prison" filled him with horror. That meant a house with iron bars in front of the windows; and Fritz Dorn, the merry wag, had told him that when people were in prison they got nothing to eat but poisoned dumplings. As he passed along the streets of Altenberg he used to cast furtive glances at the grated windows of the cellars, and think with a shiver of the never-changing bill of fare in force behind them.

Asmus was told that the *Marseillaise* was a revolutionary song, and revolution—he had picked that up already on some occasion or other—revolution was something like war—like fighting with swords and guns—something grandly beautiful, too. And he was soon to have an opportunity of satisfying his martial instincts.* The Holstenloch was full of queer, mysterious things; at one end of it were lifeless dye-works and a fathomless pond, and at the other was a huge garden which had been allowed to run wild, and in which were quantities of absolutely neglected fruit-trees; and in this garden, almost completely hidden from view, was a long, gloomy-looking building with high, arched windows that had once been a chicory-factory, and now looked like a dead church that had lost its tower. It goes without saying that in such a territory brigandage was rampant. As soon as the various parts in the game of brigands and soldiers were allotted, the excitement became intense, and gleaming eyes were to be seen on all sides. There were always candidates for the part of brigand and never a one for that of soldier, and the part of constable was only accepted under compulsion. Even in these youngsters the spirit of resistance to civil law and order was very strong.

Asmus longed to be a brigand. What could possibly be more delightful than to sit amongst the branches of a tree, hidden and secure from observation, to look into the eyes of the dead church, and to laugh scornfully at the stupid, cowardly soldiers who were crawling about between the shrubs and trying to find him? or to barricade himself up in the factory, prepared to defend his freedom with the last drop of his blood, and then to shoot through the open windows while the besiegers' shots came rattling against the panes—bang, bang, bang! cling, boom, clirrr! And though Asmus was the smallest of all the brigands, he considered himself in honour bound to defend himself with all his might and main, and when, in spite of all his efforts, the mercenaries succeeded after a short struggle in binding his hands behind his back, he looked upon it in all seriousness as a bitter degradation, and ground his teeth in impotent fury. But it was quite impossible to capture the chief of the band, a tall rascal of about fifteen years of age, who dealt out blows with his arms in every direction like a windmill gone mad, and would rather have his jacket and shirt torn off his body than yield to his assailants. He was their hero, and they endeavoured to imitate everything he did. They held him in high esteem, too, on account of his many excellent qualities and other talents that he possessed.

He could perform wonders in the way of smoking, was the owner of an enormous pipe with a lid to it, similar to those smoked by gamekeepers and foresters, and when he did not happen to be on duty as a robber chief he would smoke continuously, and yet never lose an atom of his colour. When the fight was over, and they had all calmed down, and

the light began to fade into the filmy darkness of the summer night, brigands and soldiers would all throw themselves down on the ground in the shadow of some rough shed or of a white-thorn bush, and would form a circle round the patriarch with the pipe. Those who were well enough off would smoke either shag or Porto Rico (*petum optimum subter solem*), two and a half pfennige cigars or one pfennig cigarettes, white-thorn leaves or a piece of cane. When the patriarch opened his mouth and spoke, the circle would listen in reverential silence. He used to tell them gruesome stories of the horrible deeds that had been committed at various times by bands of brigands, stories which never failed to end up with the capture of the delinquents, who were punished by having thousands of little gashes made in their backs into which pepper and salt would be rubbed. All of them felt that the rights of virtue and justice had been vindicated in the most gratifying way; but as soon as the game recommenced they were all brigands again to the core of their hearts. Those were blissful evenings, and for Asmus one of them was especially so, that was the evening when he smoked to the very end the half of a cigar which his father had left lying about. It did him no harm; probably he was so thoroughly saturated with the juice and the aroma of tobacco as to be immune against its poisonous effects.

"You wicked boy," exclaimed Rebekka Semper, "you've been smoking!"

"I? No—~~I~~—"

But Rebekka was a prompt administrator of justice. She would cross-examine, send up for trial, pass sentence, and carry the sentence out in one installment, and so she gave her small son a box on

the ears. It did not hurt him very much, but it made a lasting impression upon him, and in future when Asmus came home from the Council of Wise Men he always kept at a safe distance from his mother.

CHAPTER XVI

WHY ASMUS WAS SO LONG MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME,
WHY THE RAILWAY BROUGHT CANNONS, AND WHY
IN 1870 THINGS WERE NOT THE SAME AS IN 1848.

EVEN after that box on the ear, Asmus was not able to resist with the requisite firmness the allurements of the pleasures of this world, more especially when his mother sent him out on errands. The children of Oldensund were usually dispatched to the neighbouring township of Altenberg to purchase household necessities; for between the two places there was a custom-house barrier, and on the other side of that barrier everything was one pfennig (one-eighth of a penny) cheaper. Small quantities might be taken across the border-line free of duty, and the exciseman, who had a loaded gun standing up close beside him, used to examine every basket and every bundle, and then put on an expression as if he had not the remotest idea how much was being smuggled. Amongst the grocers of Altenberg was one of a sanguine temperament, who was in the habit of giving a lollipop or two to every child who purchased anything at his shop; and one of a phlegmatic temperament, who only gave them something when he was in the right mood; and one who suffered from rheumatism who never gave them anything at all. To the last one they only went when they could not help themselves.

Rebekka Semper used to send Asmus to the shops by preference, because he never forgot anything, even if he had as many as twelve different things to buy. While he was reciting his sugar, coffee, sago, ground-rice, groats, plums, pepper, salt, cinnamon, and treacle litany, with the price and weight, the sanguine grocer would look steadily into his eyes the whole time, and if the litany had been an unusually long and difficult one the smart-looking, little man, who hopped about his shop like a siskin in a cage, would give him a Schiller-stick. This was a stick made of tough, viscous sugar. If two children, one at each end, took hold of it with their mouths, each of them could move back twenty paces and it would not break in two. These sugar-sticks were in great favour with the young folk, and if that is not the reason why they were called Schiller-sticks, I know of no other. Even a piece of one of these sticks was such a lasting bit of happiness that it could be a source of delight all the way home; whereas an ordinary lollipop soon comes to an end. And when, like one of Lyonel's arias, it has dissolved into nothingness, what more natural than that your thoughts should turn of their own accord to the interior of the basket, with the object of considering the contents of the various paper cups? The grocer had such a horridly clever way of fastening up those cups that it was a most difficult matter to fold them over again in exactly the same way. It is always a difficult matter to restore anything that has been tampered with to its pristine condition, even if it is only a paper cup with sugar in it; and 'Rebekka Semper had a very sharp eye for cups with inviting contents. Asmus had to watch the grocers for a long time before he acquired the art of closing up paper cups exactly as they did. Treacle was most obliging

in this respect. If you dipped your first finger into it, and twirled it round several times in the middle of the pot, the thread of treacle would break off, and you could then lick your fingers, and your conscience would not trouble you in the least; a few minutes later the treacle would be quite smooth again, as smooth as a pool in the midst of a wood when not a breath of wind is astir. But even treacle had one very trying peculiarity. Just when you were thinking of Oberon and Titania, or of the quiet duckpond in the Kurze Elend, and happened to let your hand sink down slowly into the pot, the treacle, without concerning itself in the least about Oberon or the duckpond, would flow out over the edge of the pot, and then on to the ground.

And there was really so much to look at and to dream about during that long walk. The first thing you came to was that glorious farm of Harbeck's, with all its still life—the blinking watch-dog, the waddling geese, the lowing cows, the stamping horses, the clattering pails, and the pitch-forks leaning so comfortably up against the wall; the two storks on the roof, who stood sometimes on one leg and sometimes on two, and then often made you wait such a long time before they flapped their wings; then came the school, which with its Gothic façade looked so much like a church that you could imagine that the pastor was officiating there, and opposite which Asmus used to stand time after time, filled with fearful longing and a hopeful faith in the future; after that came a much neglected farm, with a filthy yard, but there, too, however, there were some interesting things to be seen, which you could look at for quite a while; then the little, wee house with the door divided into two halves in which dwelt the horrible witch, whom

one evening, when it was dusk, he had seen leaning over the lower half of the door, and who had grinned at him like the witch in the house made of cakes; then the farmyard, with the weird looking farm-man who looked as if he were contemplating committing some dreadful crime, and who had once set the watch-dog on to him when there was not the least cause for it; then the Jewish cemetery with the tumble-down, moss-covered palings, through which, if you bent down, you could see the old graves with the curious inscriptions; then in the narrow, uneven street the barber's basin that had been such a source of delight to him when he was a little boy of two, and which was a luminous point in his past life that would never lose its brightness; then the man in the cellar who painted on china, and who sent plates and cups twirling round on a wheel, and then passed a paint brush over them with the greatest rapidity, and whom Asmus watched so many times, and for so long at a time, that at last he was absolutely convinced he could paint on porcelain himself; and then, that was the last but by no means the least of all these delightful things, the railway which went across the frontier, on the top of an embankment. It was always bringing something fresh; at one time there would be three carriages, at another thirty, if you counted them very carefully; now it would bring wood and skins, now cows and pigs, and now human beings. Sometimes the engine went forwards, and sometimes it seemed to think it great fun to run backwards; at times it would give a little screech like a woman when a mouse jumps on to her lap, and at other times it would scream for a long time in the most heartrending fashion, as if some one were sticking a knife ten yards long, ten yards deep into its heart,

and then it would cry out: "Hou-ou-ou-oush, now I'm dead!" And now and then it would screech like a peasant girl: "Huhe-e-e! here I am, and just you make way for me—or I will drive over you and smash you to smithereens, every man-jack of you."

Yes, indeed, there were heaps of things to look at and to think about during that long journey, and when Asmus Semper was a child the stretch of country between the Holstenloch and the grocers' shops in Altenberg was a land of promise which on high-days and holidays flowed with milk and treacle.

One hot day in July the railway brought something more than usually interesting and wonderful, and that was cannons. Asmus stood there with his basket on his arm, and looked up at the embankment with a look of wonderment in his eyes; cannons were coming along there—cannons—cannons.

He thought they must soon be coming to an end; but more cannons followed—cannons—cannons.

On his way home he perceived his motherly little friend Adolfine Moses about twenty paces in front of him, waddling along as fast as she could.

"Adolfine," he shouted, "Adolfine, wait for me!"

Adolfine halted, and turning her head round showed a face on which the greatest consternation was depicted.

"Oh lor, young 'un, hurry up, do! Oh dear, oh dear! I'm so afeard."

"Whatever for?" asked Asmus.

"Oh lor, young 'un, ain't you heard the news? France has declared war against us, and the French are at Kiel, every man-jack of 'em, and now they're coming on to us. Oh dear, oh dear! Let's get home as fast as ever we can, p'raps they're there already! Oh dear, oh dear!"

"That accounts for the cannons," thought Asmus, but he took a much more optimistic view of the state of affairs than did Adolfine; if the Germans had such a lot of cannons they would be able to settle those French people. But Adolfine told him so many dreadful stories about the French, who had been in Hamburg in 1813, in which she evidently believed as implicitly as if she had been there herself, that Asmus reached home in a somewhat perturbed state of mind. At home, too, he found them all in a very depressed condition. True, no one in the family was directly affected by the calamity. Ludwig Semper was too old to be enrolled, and his sons too young; but Ludwig Semper had romantic ideas with regard to the importance and power of France. When he was a young man it was still considered that a German had done the right and proper thing if he quenched his enthusiasm by the Seine, by the Piræus, or by the Vistula. He had always been full of admiration for the intellectual and military exploits of the French; as a boy he had sympathised with Byron and all the Hellenes. In the Sempers' house the names of Kosciusko and Ostrolenko were always mentioned in accents that betokened the greatest veneration, and when Ludwig sang:—

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"Let no man try my fate to learn,"

it really sounded like a funeral hymn for one gone to his death before his time. Carsten Semper had bequeathed to his Ludwig the greater part of his Napoleon cult, and that Ludwig Semper was a poet, though without power of expression, goes without saying—for him a great man was great and good and splendid in every respect. A remark like that of Heine's: "Britannia, great is thy Ocean, but it

will not suffice to wash away the shame which the great defunct bequeathed to thee on his deathbed," would set his heart on fire, and when he told them what Napoleon's last wish had been: "Je veux que mes cendres reposent aux bords de la Seine au milieu de ce peuple français, que j'ai tant aimé," the tears were very near the surface. For him France was still Napoleon and Napoleon France, and he repudiated, with a hopeless smile, the idea that the poor, wretched Germans would be able to overcome such splendid forces.

At first Asmus's idea of war had been that the enemy's soldiers would come into every town, into every village, and into every house, and would take away everything they could lay hands on, set fire to everything, and kill every living creature. When he perceived that, despite the war, the breadman and the milkman went their rounds just as usual, that the children played at "Ring a ring o' roses," etc., just as usual, and that the watchman sounded his rattle during the night, so as to give any thieves timely notice of his approach, at the usual hours, he calmed down, and the great questions of national policy continued to be matters of indifference to his seven-year-old heart. War even brought along with it for him a highly interesting and quite idyllic occupation. Farmer Harbeck had been obliged to let his son and head man join the dragoons, and now Asmus had to do his best to fill the vacant place. All the young men were in the field; farm-hands were very difficult to find, and consequently the farmer had recourse to the school-boys for help. He employed them to drive the cows to the meadows, to water the horses, to rake the hay into heaps and to strew it about again. True, Asmus's activity was chiefly confined to standing beside things,

running along by the side and shouting out, "Heh! ha! ho!" whenever a cow forsook the path of duty; but anyhow he was more useful to Farmer Harbeck than to his father; for in spite of his love for the latter he could not conquer his dislike to tobacco-stripping. Thus it is very probable that when the Corps of the Third Army was paying with 1500 dead and wounded men for Geisberg and Weissenburg, Asmus was bestowing friendly little pats on the flanks of the grey cart-horse, Joch; that when General von François' Brigade stormed the Red Hill near Spicheren, and its commander died a hero's death, Asmus was taking the brindled cow Grete severely to task for her goings-on; and that the Third and Tenth Prussian Corps were struggling for victory with death itself beneath the blood-red sun of Vionville when little Semper was lying in a haycock, blinking up at the sun of Oldensund as it passed quietly on its way over a beautiful world.

But very gradually the significance of all those things that were happening so very far away dawned upon him, and the varying expressions on his father's face helped greatly to enlighten him. The Sempers could not afford a newspaper; but on the days when there was to be meat for dinner, Ludwig Semper, in accordance with an old family custom, would fetch the meat from the butcher's, and then he would bring news home with it which he would carry in his head and on his face. Weissenburg—Wörth—The Heights of Spicheren—Mars la Tour—an expression of amazement that grew greater and greater, a joyful look of bewildered astonishment such as must have been depicted on the faces of the Israelites when David conquered Goliath. At the very first battle that took place Ludwig Semper's German heart went over

to the side of his own people and ceased to adore the French, and then a few memories awoke in him again, memories of 1848, '49, '50. True, the fighting that took place then was not to be compared to the struggle of the nations that was going on over yonder. In comparison with that '48 was almost an idyll. Ludwig would tell them merry, genial stories of this war; how once he had been doing outpost duty on a hill, and on another height over there a Danish outpost was stationed, how he, Ludwig Semper, stuck his shako on his rifle and held it up in the air and waved it backwards and forwards, and how the Dane had done the same with his cap. And how another time, one bitter cold Christmas night, when Ludwig Semper was again standing sentinel, he heard something creeping behind him through the bushes, and when he shouted out, "Who goes there?" the answer he got was "Barley in buttermilk!" and, lo and behold! there was a friend of his holding out a steaming basin of soup, a most delicious sight to the freezing man. But they had had bad times too, it is true; the shot had come whistling round your ears as it is whistling now, and the shells had sung as they are singing now.

"Did you shoot any of them dead?" Asmus asked his father.

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"I can't tell," answered Ludwig, with a shake of his head, and he began to talk about something else.

CHAPTER XVII

A CHAPTER THAT SEEMS INCREDIBLE, FOR IT TELLS
ABOUT LUDWIG SEMPER'S ENERGY.

BUT the fact that this was an *annus mirabilis* was to be made still more evident to little Asmus. One morning he went to meet his father, who had gone to fetch the meat; it was a lovely morning. He caught sight of his father striding along at an unusually quick pace, and when he was still about twenty yards away from him Ludwig Semper threw his arms up into the air and shouted out:—

“The Emperor Napoleon has been taken prisoner, and a hundred thousand Frenchmen have been taken prisoner. The Germans have gained a great victory. The war is over!”

And all that day, his father was not a bit like himself. He was not at all talkative as a rule, and to Asmus he only talked about things that were within the child's comprehension; but that day he never stopped talking. He told his little son everything he had read in the newspapers, things that only grown-ups can understand, and only a few of them; but as Ludwig Semper had no grown-up person at hand to whom he could pour out his thoughts, his little son Asmus had to be a grown-up for the nonce. And after a short spell of bewilderment at the commencement of the performance Asmus soon adapted

himself to his rôle; he comprehended what was required of him on such an important occasion, and nodded his head in the most dignified manner imaginable, and said "H'm!" in the most intelligent manner imaginable. But when they arrived at the Holstenloch, he could not contain himself any longer, but was obliged to rush on ahead of his father, tear open the door, and scream out—

"A hundred thousand Frenchmen have been taken prisoner and—and the war is taken prisoner—Napoleon is over!"

And at that wonderful time, something else happened, something else occurred that was almost more marvellous than that marvellous happening at Sedan. Ludwig Semper came to a decision, and carried it out too. Whether it was the general excitement that gave so great an impetus to his will-power, or whether it was one of those rare moments when arms reach down from above and raise us up without any effort on our part, so that we are enabled to accomplish things that are far beyond our own strength—who can tell?

The decision that Ludwig Semper came to was that he would send his Asmus to school; and he came to another decision at the same time, and that was to have him christened to make it possible for him to do this. Ludwig Semper was a free-thinker on all subjects, but he did not make his views public, and it was not on account of his religious convictions that his son had not been christened before. His own religion consisted in wishing to be good, in letting other people alone, and expecting to be let alone himself, his motto being, "Live and let live," and in a deep-rooted dislike to cursing and blasphemy,

which he would never allow in his presence. But neither was it on account of his religious convictions, either, that he had his son christened in the end. A christening necessitated both money and a decision, and possibly, up to that moment, Ludwig Semper had had neither. Consequently Asmus had continued to be a heathen. Now both were there, consequently Asmus was christened.

The pastor's character seemed to be similar to Ludwig Semper's; it never occurred to him to reprove the man whom every one held in such high esteem for having neglected his duty as a Christian. The boy took a fancy to the kindly-looking old man with the aureole of white hair round his chin, his kind words affected him very pleasantly even though their meaning was not clear to him and he had as little idea as a baby in long clothes why he was being christened. The minister asked the witnesses something, to which they answered "Yes"; sprinkled the water on the boy's hair three times; and when Asmus was thinking that the strange and wonderful event must be just about to happen, the ceremony came to an end. But in spite of his disappointment, all that day Asmus considered himself a very interesting personage, and took care to inform any of his playmates whom he came across that he had just been christened.

And what is still harder to believe, Ludwig actually carried out his second decision. One beautiful summer day he said to Asmus, in a voice about which there was something very odd: "I am going to take you to school to-morrow."

They were to set off at eight o'clock in the morning. At seven, Asmus was standing at the door fully

equipped, a slate in his left hand, and a slate-pencil in his right, like shield and sword. His parents and his brothers went into fits of laughter at the sight; but he didn't care. He had no intention of letting the right moment for entering the new country slip by. It might have been a quarter past seven when he took both his slate and his slate-pencil in his right hand and pressed down the latch with the left one. One ought to be ready and waiting. He had no appetite for bread-and-milk, he had only an appetite for learning. At last Ludwig Semper could not bear to look at him any longer, and so he began getting ready to start earlier than there was any necessity for. But no sooner was it evident that he was about to put on his coat than his son darted out of the room and rushed off without a word of farewell. But Ludwig Semper had a measured, dignified way of walking, and nothing but a second Sedan could have made him march at the pace he had done on September 2. Asmus remained ahead of him, and must have looked round at least a hundred times; his father walked so horribly slowly. But at last they were standing in front of the school with the high Gothic windows, and then, all at once, the little boy's heart began to beat violently. He had a vision of the teacher sitting at his desk with a cane in his left hand, like that emperor with a sceptre he had seen in a picture, and surveying the new boy with stern, angry-looking eyes. A multitude of children were streaming into the school, laughing, shouting, whistling, and scuffling. There were some big fellows among them of fourteen and fifteen years of age, and Asmus thought: "What a lot those boys must have learnt! How frightfully clever they must be by this time!"

And then they were standing in front of the teacher. But he proved to be a very kind-looking man, with a beautiful brown beard. His name was Schulz. He shook hands with Ludwig Semper, and then took Asmus's round cheeks between his two hands, and said: "How do you do, my boy?"

"Well, has he learnt anything yet?" asked Herr Schulz.

"Yes, he can read," replied the father.

"We'll see what he can do then!" said Herr Schulz, opening a book. "Read away, my boy."

Asmus read as if it were mere child's play:—

"THE MIRROR.

"Matilda was very passionate. Her mother had often. . . ."

"Well done, my child; very good indeed," said the teacher. Then Asmus had to do some sums, but he did not manage that so well. Ludwig Semper had not thought of sums. And how about writing? He could not write at all.

"Sit down over there then," said Herr Schulz, pointing to a place at the end of the room, close to the wall. Ludwig gave his son a final nod, shook hands with the teacher, and departed.

CHAPTER XVIII

TREATS OF THE EAST AND OF THE WEST, AND OF ANCIENT HYMNS IN MODERN TIMES.

THE very first day of his school-life, Asmus learnt one of the most difficult and one of the most important things there is to be learnt, *i.e.* how the world came into being, and how man was made. Their teacher represented it to them very clearly; he took hold of one of the boys and blew up into his nose. That was what God had done. Asmus devoured the teacher with his eyes, and listened as if he expected to be called upon himself in a minute to do exactly as God had done. He kept his hands on the desk in front of him with the fingers tightly interlaced, for Adolfine Moses had told him that was the correct way to sit at school. The delights of the Garden of Eden were also depicted in the most vivid manner possible by Herr Schulz. He hopped and skipped about the room, clapped his hands together in wonder and amazement, and showed them how Adam and Eve had expressed their satisfaction:

“Just look at the beautiful flowers! And what a big green tree that is! And how deliciously sweet these apples are! And then all at once they saw a lion coming along, but he didn't touch them!”

When he was home again, Asmus had told his parents all about the Creation almost before he had

divested himself of his slate and cap. He took it for granted that they had never heard of the event before. He hopped and skipped about the room, and showed them how Adam and Eve had expressed their delight, and cried out with exactly the same accent as his teacher's :—

“Just look what a beautiful green tree! And there all at once—what’s that coming along? Boy, boy, oh dear, oh dear! it’s a lion! But are you afraid he will hurt you? Won’t even touch you!”

After that came the Fall of Man and Cain’s Fratricide, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel, the Call of Abraham and his Obedience, and all the other stories which, in spite of all that is inexplicable and odd about them, find their way to children’s hearts because they have come down to us from the childhood of the human race, and, like children, are full of dreams, premonitions, and hopes.

The hard winter of the war-year had commenced, and when the Sempers looked out of their window one morning, they saw that their wretched little abode was almost buried in the snow. The breadman panted as he stamped along in high boots, and complained that his nostrils were always getting frozen together, and the milkman’s milk froze in his pails.

“The children had better stay at home to-day,” said Ludwig Semper. Asmus’s eyes grew round with alarm, and he cried out that he really must go to school; and when they refused to let him, he howled and sobbed and besought them so piteously that at last they gave way. He trudged through the deep snow in the village impelled by an intense longing for the sunny land, where, during the hottest part of the day, Abraham sat in front of the door of his tent, and entertained the Lord and His angels. But just at that

time Asmus possessed neither boots nor gloves; the slate slipped out of his frozen fingers, and the snow crept in between his wooden shoes and his stockings, and drew warmth out of his feet to melt itself. He was very glad when he got to school, though much against his will the tears were streaming from his eyes. The master told him to wipe the snow off his feet, gave him a place quite close to the stove, and recommended him to draw his feet up on to the form and to sit on them. And he had a wonderful time at school that day. Only eleven or twelve children had put in an appearance, the other fifty or sixty had been frightened away by the weather. They ought really to have had a reading and writing lesson, but for that it was much too dark; it seemed as if day was only just beginning to dawn. So the master sat round the stove with the twelve, and poked up the fire so that the red glow danced about on their faces, and then he began to tell them things. And, lo and behold! in front of the stove, in the room full of winter's gloom there blossomed forth the sunshiny story of Eliezer who by the well outside Nahor's city courted Rebekah for his master's son—a story in the course of which he described the peaceful life of the shepherd, who at night, when his sheep are gathered together in the fold, gazes meditatively at the sky for hours at a time, and while he tends the cattle in the pastures lifts up his eyes and contemplates silently the mountains, across which once in every ten years come greetings from his friends, and down the slopes of which once in every twenty years come some of his kindred who are so dear to him. If you had glanced at little Asmus you would have seen that the pupils of his eyes never left Eliezer during the whole of that long, long journey to Mesopotamia, and at the words, "Behold

Rebekah, Bethuel's daughter, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder, and she was very fair to look upon," Asmus's face became absolutely beautiful, and when at Eliezer's request to let him drink she made haste to let down the pitcher on to her hand, and said: "Drink, my lord!" Asmus bent his head and smiled sweetly, and let Abraham's faithful servant drink; and when she said: "I will draw water for the camels also," and ran busily backwards and forwards between the well and the trough, he wondered, with Eliezer, at her grace and beauty; and when the faithful servant exclaimed: "Blessed be the Lord God who has led me to the house of my master's brethren!" Asmus drew a deep breath and thought: "Yes, that is the one he will have to take."

He could not have told why this story gave him such unspeakable pleasure; but in the pleasant warmth which was thawing his little frozen limbs, and in the soft dusky light of the big room, he realised all unconsciously that in this story there is the freshness of the early morn of the life of the human race.

He realised the rhythmic flow of a Life Force which arranges even the union of two human beings in accordance with the customs of nomadic peoples, and joins them together in mute submission to an unspoken, everlasting natural law.

He felt sure, too, that he knew where this story had taken place: Am Rain, in that green valley where it had always been Sunday, between the two railway embankments, there where they divided and went off in two different directions, one towards the west and the other towards the north, there it was that all those things must have happened. That must be the East. There, too, Abraham must have dwelt; on the edge of those heights, above the green

valley he had raised the knife to slay his son Isaac ; there on that broad, flat tract of country Lot's wife had been changed into a pillar of salt when she turned round and looked back at the flames on the horizon. And the Creation must have taken place at the Düstere lange Balken ; there the Spirit of God had moved over that vast meadow when it was without form and void, and had said : " Let there be light ! " In the Holstenloch, over there where it began to be so lonesome, the Wolf must have walked by the side of Little Red-Riding-Hood ; Snow-White's mother must have sat at the window in the Kurze Elend and pricked her finger ; and in the Lange Jammer must have stood somewhere up in the air Frau Holle's gate, from which the cock crowed out : " Kikeriki ! Back again is our golden maidie."

In this way he assigned its place to every story, but those stories which seemed to him to be more especially suffused with sunshine he always fancied must have taken place somewhere in the neighbourhood of that green valley between the railway embankments. There, too, the Child Jesus must have been born. And the hymn which Herr Schulz, after he had finished talking to them, gave out to them to sing, was all about the Child Jesus too. When he took the violin out of the cupboard the children exclaimed : " A-ah ! " They were not spoilt in those days. The hymn was called *The Best Friend*. Here are the words :—

' Our best Friend dwells in highest Heaven,
True friends, alas, on earth are rare ;
And oft has honour vainly striven
Against the world's false show and glare.
And from my soul the cry ascends :
Christ Jesus is the Friend of Friends.

Men sway like reeds before the blast,
O'er Christ, our Rock, no storms prevail;
And though my soul may be downcast,
I know His friendship cannot fail.
In joy and grief my soul depends
On Jesus Christ, the Friend of Friends.

My Friend doth give His heart to me,
And I am His for evermore;
His love is infinite and free,
And still is mine when life is o'er.
Said I not well? No love transcends
The love of Christ, the Friend of Friends."

Thus they sang to a popular tune, that sounded like a cradle-song of a hundred years or so ago, the gentle pietism and homely single-heartedness of the good Pastor Benjamin Schmolcke of Schweidnitz, who wrote those words in the year of grace 1704. In the world outside, the Tenth Army Corps was fighting with the right wing of the Army of the Loire by Beaune la Rolande, and the guns and swords of Hamburg's sons were helping at Loigny to repulse the left wing and to prevent Gambetta's plans from being carried out. In the world outside, too, people were being talked about who called themselves Social Democrats, people who protested against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, and whom Bismarck sent to prison.

CHAPTER XIX

TELLS HOW ASMUS SEMPER BECAME A PLACE-HUNTER
AND WISHED FOR FAME AND GOLD, AND A PLUM-
PUDDING AND THE MEASLES.

BUT in Herr Schulz's class it was not always quite as peaceful as it had been that snowy morning. Herr Schulz was a man of energy, and it soon dawned upon Asmus that he himself was the only person who sat still with his hands in front of him. With all his other lessons Herr Schulz combined gymnastics. For instance, if his pupils had an answer ready they would jump up and stretch out their first fingers; if they felt certain it was a right answer they would jump upon the form; if they were absolutely certain it was right they would get on to the table; but if the question was a particularly difficult and unusual one, they would leave their forms, rush up to Herr Schulz, nearly put out his eyes with their little fingers, and yell out: "Me, Herr Schulz, me, me, me!" so that it looked and sounded like seven-and-thirty chickens peeping and chirping for food. If there was any question of being lively, Asmus Semper did not require much stirring up; in that respect he was the true son of his mother, and one day he was so impetuous that the teacher called out: "I say, my boy, you're putting your finger into my nose!" But he was allowed to give the answer all the same,

and when he had unburthened himself he vaulted back over the tables and forms, and over the heads of the other boys, to the very last form of all, close to the wall.

Herr Schulz had another method, too, of making things hum. He did not change his pupils' places in the class once in every six, or even in every three, months, but every minute. If Meyer did not know the name of the son of King Saul, Herr Schulz would ask Petersen, the boy sitting next to him; if he failed to answer, then the one who came next, and so on; and if the seventh yelled out "Jonathan," and his name happened to be Jansen, Herr Schulz would say: "Jansen, up seven!" and Jansen, his face beaming with joy at the victory he had gained, would gather up, with the utmost celerity, slate, books, sponge, and slate-pencil, and in the very middle of the Scripture lesson would climb to his new place over the bent necks of the seven subjugated ones. But he was not allowed to rest upon his laurels; for even though by the aid of Jonathan he had succeeded in climbing up seven rounds of the ladder, the very next moment Ishbosheth might cause him to slip down thirteen. Consequently, Herr Schulz's class-room resembled nothing so much as a bee-hive, for in it was incessant humming and perpetual motion, in order that the useful wax of culture and the sweet virgin-honey of fame might be gathered in. The only boy who took no part in this was Asmus Semper, who did not move from his place close to the wall, the reason being that the other children had been drinking at the well of knowledge for a long while and had imbibed a considerable amount of arithmetic and skill in writing, whereas Asmus Semper had to exert himself very much to make up for lost time.

One afternoon, during the writing lesson, Herr Schulz took up little Semper's copy-book and held it up for the boys to look at. "Oh dear, oh dear!" thought Asmus. But Herr Schulz said:

"Look at this writing all of you! When Asmus Semper first came to school he could scarcely write a stroke, and now he writes better than any of you. There's an example for you! Move up five forms, sonny!"

Who so surprised as Asmus Semper! Up to that moment he had always imagined that his writing was hopelessly bad, and had always surveyed it with feelings of great vexation and annoyance—and now it was said to be better than any one else's! He was so taken aback that he forgot to be pleased, and felt very strange and shy in his new place. Over there, close to the wall, in the semi-darkness it had been so nice and snug. The semi-darkness of the beginning of culture has always something snug about it.

When he told them at home about his promotion, Rebekka Semper was loud in her expressions of delight; Ludwig Semper said nothing, but he smiled; and henceforth the thought came oftener and oftener into Asmus's mind: "If only I could do something to make him smile like that again." Asmus Semper's ambition dated from that smile.

A few days later, on account of having given utterance to some very sound opinions with regard to the mode of life, the ways, and the importance of the ox, Asmus was moved on to the first form. When he informed his father of this event, he placed himself in front of him and looked straight up into his face. And just what he had thought: Ludwig Semper's smile was still more radiant than the first

one, and he raised his eyebrows higher and opened his eyes wider than he had ever done before, and said: "When you are at the top of the class I will give you four schillinge."

It is not surprising that at this period of his growth little Asmus developed some rather undesirable qualities. To the thirst for fame was now added the hunger for gold, and at the same time he realised intensely the tremendous height of the summit he was striving to reach. To get to the top of the class—that might be done perhaps, but how was it possible for a little boy of eight to earn a reward of four schillinge! The magnitude of the amount enabled him to form a correct estimate of the boldness of the undertaking. Nevertheless, he was determined to accomplish it, and Asmus, Semper became a place-hunter.

But he was soon to be made aware of the fact that the road to fame does not ascend in a straight line. Herr Schulz asked him the catchy question:

"If you have a goose weighing nine pounds, and you sell it for eight schillinge the pound, how much will you make by it?"

Asmus, over-excited by the greed for gold and glory, substituted for the eight schillinge, the four schillinge which had been promised him by his father, and shouted out:—

"Thirty-six schillinge."

And for this bit of disinterestedness he went down one.

Whatever had happened? He to "slip" lower down? Asmus Semper to lose his place? Such a thing had never happened to him before. It was fortunate for him that school was over almost directly after. He snatched up his belongings like a thief,

stole hurriedly away without raising his eyes, and, as soon as he was sure he was alone, began to cry. He had, for certain, no conception as yet of what is meant by a man's honour; but he had all the sensations of a man who has lost his honour. Lost his place, *gepurzelt*, *gerutscht*. What a disgrace! He really wouldn't be able to show his face at school again! How could he tell them at home! His mother would be angry and scold him, and his father!—His father would not smile; no, indeed he wouldn't, but his face would be so sad, so sad. At the thought of that he wept aloud, and new tributaries went rushing down to join the stream of tears coursing down each of his cheeks. He cried all the way home, and when he got there sat himself down on the little hall in front of the stove and went on crying. A neighbour-woman came and asked: "Whatever is all this about, my boy? Whatever makes you cry like this?" Then Asmus's sobs became louder and louder. And the neighbour-woman called out: "I say, Frau Semper, whatever's the matter with your son? He's sitting quite still, and tears as big as pigeon's eggs is a-rolling down his face!" Then there was nothing for it but to go in and confess. And bit by bit the fearful truth was wrested from him, and after each bit came a flood of tears.

"I—hou!—have been—hou!—sent down one—hou-ou-ou . . .!"

And Rebekka Semper did think this was very dreadful; the neighbour-woman, however, gave a loud laugh, and Ludwig Semper laughed to himself so that his shoulders went jumping up and down. But it was not the smile he loved so well; that, Asmus, who was watching him very closely through a big tear, perceived very distinctly.

"Don't worry about that," said his father, "you shall have the four schillings all the same!"

So the money was not lost, though honour was. But unfortunately Asmus was not a consistent place-hunter. The next day they were to have plum-pudding with sweet lard-sauce for dinner. He was so overjoyed at this that all the time he was at school that morning he was in a fearful state of excitement, and just before twelve o'clock his spirits got the upper hand. The boys were writing on their slates, and the master was sitting at his desk and was busy writing too. All at once Asmus asked his neighbour: "Can you kick the top of the table with your foot?" "No," replied his neighbour; "can you?" In lieu of answer Asmus raised his leg, and bump went his heel down upon the table. That was, you might say, the working of a natural law. His overflowing spirits had to find a vent. Herr Schulz did not appear to be convinced of the necessity himself; he called out: "Asmus Semper, come here, please." Asmus went, was cuffed on the face, and was relegated to the second form. He would probably have bathed this disgrace also in a flood of tears if he had not had such a dinner to look forward to. When you thought of that plum-pudding it was quite impossible to cry, and compared with sauce made of treacle and lard, fame is poor stuff indeed.

The day after, five children were absent from school; because they had the measles, it was said. The next morning eleven more failed to put in an appearance; cause: the measles. On the third day, Herr Schulz discovered that no less than thirty-one of his pupils were missing. Asmus considered it awfully interesting to be absent from school on account of illness. He had heard that every child

has to have the measles once at least, and he felt injured because his turn did not come. And at last he felt quite ashamed of going to school every day in such an excellent state of health, it was so dull, he thought; and one day he said, in a very bashful way, to the boy sitting next to him: "To-morrow you will be able to sit in my place. I'm going to have the measles too."

But he went to school the day following, and the day after that also, still looking and feeling most annoyingly well. Then—on the fourth day, in the evening—something really did put in an appearance, but not the measles. He was working at his home lessons, and had just made an enormous tail to a capital G that went far lower down than it ought to have done, and was feeling that he didn't care in the least how far it went. And then he felt he cared still less how high the next letter rose up into the sky, and after that the pen fell out of his hand on to the paper. He felt so very, very tired, and at last he fell asleep over his lessons. But a minute or so after, he awoke with a violent start; he had been falling down, down, ever so far, he thought. Then he had a dull pain all over his head and felt dreadfully cold. After his mother, at his own request, had put him to bed, the little, old worm-eaten bedstead seemed as if it would break in two because the whole of his body jerked about so, and then he was violently sick. The whole of the next day, he lay in bed and did not utter a sound; and in the evening he was very feverish. To call in a doctor cost money, and as Rebekka Semper had acquired a considerable amount of medical knowledge in the Kiel Infirmary, she said: "He is going to have the measles," and she gave him some lime-flower tea. But it was not the right thing. The following

day he was much more feverish, and on the third he was delirious. Then they sent for Dr. Ollsen, who prescribed a cool room, cold baths, and something which tasted very bitter. The day after he complained that he could not swallow, and that his eyes hurt him so; and little red spots and pimples came out on his face. "Yes, he's going to have the measles," said Frau Semper; but when the doctor came he said: "It is the chicken-pox."

CHAPTER XX

ABOUT THE SMALL-POX, AND ABOUT BRIGHT DAYS
UNDER A DARK SKY. ABOUT LUDWIG SEMPER'S
HOPE.

It was not very long before little Asmus was completely covered with spots; they came in his mouth, too, and on the corneas of his eyes. After enough spots had come out he felt rather better, and, in a very weak little voice, would make an occasional remark to his parents or to his brothers. But then the real illness began, and the doctor said: "He has small-pox and no mistake," and came twice every day. His mother had to wind linen rags smeared with ointment all over the little fellow's body, and to put cold compresses on his eyes, and the room had to be made quite dark. The little man let them do anything they liked with him and never uttered a sound, except in the evening, when he would become rather talkative. "I've lost my way," he would cry. "Oh dear! what shall I do, I've lost my way! Why have you made so much snow? And my lantern has gone out; you will light it again for me, Fräulein Johanna, won't you? — Ou — ou, what a lot of Austrians!" he would mutter to himself. But at last he stopped talking altogether, and lay there absolutely motionless, and the doctor told his parents they must give up all hope.

All the nourishment the child required was injected ; there were no signs of life about him except that the blood flowed from his little nose and out of his mouth.

You could tell from the doctor's manner that he was very astonished each day to find the little boy still alive. "The pustules are beginning to dry up," he said ; "perhaps he will pull through after all."

It seemed to the Sempers as if the sun had never shone so brightly as it did that day.

And, lo and behold ! one morning they actually heard words coming from the direction of the sick boy's bed. In a second Rebekka was standing by the side of it and asking :—

"What do you want, Trudel dear ?"

"It itches so," said Asmus quite distinctly.

"God be thanked, my boy !" she cried out rapturously ; "let it itch away as long as it likes, so long as we don't lose you." In her joy it never occurred to her that he might not feel quite the same with regard to the itching.

"But it itches so horribly !" he exclaimed, with greater emphasis. Then she fetched some wet rags and put them on him. But then a fresh spectre appeared, which was even more horrible than the first.

"Hasn't he opened his eyes yet ?" asked Dr. Ollsen one day.

"No," said Frav Semper.

"H'm !" There was a peculiar expression on the doctor's face. "I only hope there's nothing wrong with his eyes !"

"For God's sake, Doctor, do you think it may have made him blind ?"

"Possibly, but we will trust not," said the doctor, but he did not look very confident.

Asmus blind! Ludwig Semper recalled how the child's big eyes had rejoiced in the brightness of the light when he looked out into the world; he recalled the look in those eyes when the little fellow had remarked during their walk that Sunday morning: "Father, it looks just like your birthday here," and "Father, this is just like the place where Isaac lived when Esau took the venison to him." The mere thought of such a calamity made the father feel as if his heart was being pierced with a thousand daggers.

Soon after, Asmus opened his eyes, it is true, but he could not see any of the things they held in front of him, and the doctor would not allow them to make the room lighter.

Four days later Ludwig and Johannes Semper, who were sitting at their work, were frightened almost out of their wits by a loud scream from the adjoining room. They jumped up immediately, and were about to rush out to see what could be the matter, when the door was suddenly flung open and Frau Semper shouted out: "He can see, he can see!" That is to say, it was not exactly a shout, but a sound that was a combination of sobbing and laughing and crying, the smallest of its constituents being articulate speech.

And then Frau Semper told them: She was sitting by the side of the bed, feeling very sad indeed, and was peeling potatoes, when all at once Asmus said, "Mother, what's that red thing?" There was a red stocking lying at the foot of the bed, you must know—and then she could not help giving a scream, and had bounded up off her chair; and to prove the truth of her story there were the potatoes and potato peelings lying all about the floor.

And now Asmus had a grand time. They fed him

up and cosseted him. Every morning he had a lightly-boiled new-laid egg given him to eat. He could not remember ever having had a whole egg in his hand before. But he gave some of it to Alfred and Reinhold. And the neighbour-woman brought him some chicken broth. "When you're ill you live like an emperor," thought Asmus. He did not care much for the broth, but he felt very solemn while he was eating it, and very sorry for the others because they were eating quite common, ordinary soup. They placed his bed so that he could see into the workshop, and could gaze at his father, and from time to time they would nod to one another, and as they did so they each of them felt: "We've played Death a splendid trick this time, haven't we! We are going to stay together a little longer and are going to have a grand time."

But the very best thing that he got while he was being nursed was his mother. When she had been very strict or very angry with him, he had often fancied she did not care for him; and more especially was that the case when she was unjust to him and kept on repeating that his father treated the young scaramouch as if he was a golden apple. During his illness, however, he found his mother, and when she was petting him or nursing him with such tender care, he would think: "I should like to be ill my whole life long."

At the time when there had been cause for anxiety lest the child should scratch off the scabs, they had wound rags round his hands and had fastened them very securely, so that only a few marks here and there were left on his body, but amongst these was one over the left eye. When he went back to school he was very proud of this highly interesting scar.

He pointed it out to the other boys, and told them they had no cause to be proud of their measly measles; as far as having been ill was concerned he was now most undoubtedly at the top of the class.

At school Asmus heard that Herr Kleensang had been killed at the battle of Loigny. Herr Kleensang killed! That was the nice, kind man who had taught him gymnastics, and who had made such delightful jokes, and had always given breakfast and clothes to the children who were poor, although he was very poor himself, and when he had given them something he had always made a rhyme to suit the gift. If he gave a hungry child an enormous hunch of bread, he used to say:—

“Take this crust,
Eat it you must;”

or:—

“Here, my son, some bread and jam,
Enjoy it, my child, as if it was lamb.”

And once, when a boy came to school in his shirt-sleeves because he did not possess a jacket, Herr Kleensang gave him his own black tail-coat, and said:—

“Here, my boy, I give you my coat,
If you keep on the tails
You'll be able to float.”

And such a man had been shot down by a gun, he was dead, was lying in the black earth and would never come back again! All at once Asmus realised the true significance of things. The picture-sheets representing the battles of Wörth and Sedan, on which the Crown Prince, or King William, or some general or other, was carving his way with his sword through a mass of red and yellow, and on which in the foreground, as a sort of ornamentation, two nice corpses

had been stuck in, these pictures had not appealed to him in the least. But now he understood how dearly war is paid for.

In the interim, French prisoners had been arriving in Hamburg. One morning, as Asmus, with his basket hanging on his arm, was coming out of the shop of the phlegmatic grocer, he saw two real live Frenchmen walking along; yes, would you believe it? two real live Frenchmen, with blue caps and coats, red trousers, and walking-sticks. Asmus thought: "I expect they feel very sad and angry; just you show them that you do not feel angry with them, that will please them." And as they were passing him he called out:

"Bonjour, messieurs!"

They both looked up into the air, very much astonished, and then they laughed and nodded, and called back:

"Bonjour, bonjour, mon petit!"

And Asmus went home feeling very pleased with himself in consequence of this interchange of international courtesies.

On March 2, at ten o'clock in the morning, Herr Schulz was called out of the class-room. In a few minutes he came back again, crying out:—

"Children, peace is concluded! You can all go home!"

With shouts of joy, they all rushed out into the beautiful Spring day. On an occasion of this sort there always seems to be something in the air which makes every one feel he must celebrate it, even though he does not in the least realise the why and wherefore. In the evening, Oldensund, Altenberg, and Hamburg were illuminated, the smallest draper or greengrocer placed little candles in his windows, and the sight was a very pretty one. But Asmus Semper did not think

it was anything so very wonderful. The whole live-long day he had been illuminating the whole of space, the whole world in fact—and all at his own expense. On occasions of this sort he was never shabby.

When Easter came it found Asmus at the top of the class. But he was in very great danger of losing his place again the very same day; for he was so restless and excited that he wriggled about on his seat, gave confused answers, and was longing to run off and tell his father the news. The boy next him offered him a lovely big bit of india-rubber if he would change places with him on the morrow. Herr Schulz would never notice it, he said. But Asmus smiled a most superior smile. A piece of india-rubber against his father's, Ludwig Semper's, smile! Ha! ha!

When he told his father, in stuttering tones, of his great good fortune, strange to say Ludwig did not smile. He put his hand on the boy's head and stared right down into him; and his face was much more beautiful than any smile. Then he looked out of the window, but left his strong, warm hand on the child's head. Asmus could no longer see his father's face, and if he could have he would not have been able to read it. But the quiet, serene face said: "Who can tell, maybe through him the Sempers will rise again."

BOOK II

CHAPTER XXI

TREATS OF THE PEACE OF FRANKFORT, OF THE BATTLE
OF OFFENDORF, AND OF ANOTHER LOVE-AFFAIR.

WE will commence this chapter with one of those retrospective, historical, philosophical dissertations which are so appropriate in novels.

After the terms of peace had been settled by the combatants at the "White Swan," in Frankfort, we may take it for granted that it did not occur to them that one of the effects of the Peace would be that the Semper family would not get their dinner until two hours after the usual time. But that was most certainly the case. That very day Frau Semper said, very good-temperedly, to her Asmus:—

"Trudel, just run over to Altenberg as fast as you can and get me half a pound of sago from Massmann's. I want it for dinner."

Now to run *fast* was really quite out of the question, because Herr Puttfarken's house was on the road he had to take to get to Massmann's. There was perhaps more poetry about Herr Puttfarken's house than about any other house in Oldensund, though "Puttfarken" is the Low German for "Sucking Pig," and the house was merely a square stone box, the shutters of which were shut from early in the morning

until late in the evening. Occasionally, however, the shutters were not quite shut; and there were holes in them too, and if you looked long enough through the holes and chinks into the darkness inside you discovered that Herr Puttfarken's stone box was nothing more or less than a great big warehouse. Horses and carts and trumpets, and drums of all sorts and sizes, were scattered about in dozens all over the rooms; but it was only on very rare occasions that you caught a glimpse of a human being or heard one moving about, though now and again a figure would appear in a very mysterious manner and would vanish as suddenly as it came. Asmus had almost made up his mind that this must be one of Father Christmas's store-houses, and the wealthy Herr Puttfarken, whom no one in Oidensund had ever set eyes on, his man-servant Ruprecht. To-day, Asmus stared with all his eyes into the darkness in which so many wonderful things were hidden, striving for some considerable time to make out whether the mounted soldiers over there belonged to the cavalry or to the artillery. He came to no decisive conclusion, and at last proceeded on his way. He bought the sago, and then, for variety's sake, chose another way home—a very roundabout one. But when he got to the railway station, he opened his eyes very wide. There were soldiers there, a whole heap of soldiers in glittering helmets; in one place they were standing with their arms lying at their feet, in another they were presenting arms, and in yet another they had piled up all their arms together, and were lying about on the ground in groups, chattering, laughing, eating bread and meat, drinking beer, and smoking. They had put wreaths of oak leaves round their helmets, and had hung them round their necks. The Ninth Army

Corps under General von Manstein had returned home again from France. Asmus was joined by one of his schoolmates, who pointed out to him a captain walking up and down in front of his company, and said: "That's General von Manstein, I believe!" Asmus believed so too, and thought: "That's a general. Yes, that's what a general looks like; yes, you can see that at once; all the others have to obey him." But soon after he caught sight of one who had some fringe on his shoulders, and then he thought: "Surely that must be the general." After that he saw one going along with a silver scarf round his waist and silver tassels hanging from his sword; and then he felt quite convinced he really had spotted the general. But after that some more passed by who were still more magnificent; and after a time he had seen fifty generals, one after the other, and the farther he went the more soldiers he saw too. At the very same place where nine months before he had seen cannons, cannons, black cannons, he now saw soldiers, laughing, merry, be-wreathed soldiers under a hot, golden, midday sun, and the little bag of sago which he was holding clasped so tightly in his hand went on getting warmer and warmer, and softer and softer, and then he noticed that two soldiers were talking and laughing about him, and one of them asked him, in the genial Low German dialect:

"I say, youngster, are you sowing dumplings?" Then he perceived that he had made a hole in the bag, and that he was leaving a narrow white trail behind him. He arrived home just two hours too late, and then it happened that the Peace of Frankfurt had yet another effect that had never entered into Bismarck's calculations, and this was that Asmus received from Rebekka, whose blood had risen up to

a great height, a very well-directed and very well-executed cuff on the back of his neck.

Another result of the Peace was that troops were mobilised in Oldensund. In a hut with an overhanging, thatched roof there lived a youthful genius who was skilled in the making of excellent shakos and sword-scabbards out of cardboard and coloured paper, and this genius supplied the young folk of Oldensund with weapons. The equipment of a common soldier cost one schilling, that of an officer two—a military simony of the worst description. Because he was the manufacturer of the scabbards and helmets the boy reserved for himself the post of commander-in-chief and general, and because he was the owner of a drum which he did not like to part from, but which he wished to have the pleasure of beating himself, he discharged the duties of drummer-boy as well. Asmus, who had only been able to scrape together one schilling, received the appointment of left leader of the rank and file; his brother Alfred, with his one schilling and a half, succeeded in purchasing the rank of sergeant. Every evening the soldiers were drilled to the accompaniment of whistling and the most energetic beating of the drum. It was not yet decided whom they should attack, but it was whispered that, in all probability, they would march against their old hereditary enemy, the youth of the neighbouring village of Offendorf. And that was what they did. One day Asmus got wind of the fact—he had no idea later on how or when he had obtained the information—that the Offendorfers had been seen near Roland's Mill. Asmus dashed through the village like wild-fire, and gave the alarm to the Oldensund army. He was absolutely convinced that he was fighting for a holy cause, and was furious with

the good-for-nothing Offendorfers who had the audacity to show themselves in the neighbourhood of Roland's Mill. The army marched out, and close to Rolandskuhle, on a hilly bit of country, the battle raged. The outcome of the struggle was that the Offendorfers were defeated, and Asmus, brave almost to rashness, was hit by a big stone just over his right eye. By the time he reached home it was so swollen that he could not see out of it, whereas General Pappenheim, who in accordance with his duty as a strategist had directed the whole battle from a distant post, re-entered his native village as victor without a scratch.

While these events were taking place, the Sempers had again changed their abode, and this time they had three really nice rooms and a real kitchen; in a real street too, though not very far from the Holstenloch. For now, that, as a result of the successful issue of the war, an improvement had set in in all branches of industry, there came likewise for Ludwig Semper and his family a period of—one might almost say—affluence. They were actually able to afford themselves the luxury of buying a second-hand sofa and second-hand mirror, which were universally admired both by the family and by their neighbours; and Johannes, who was now in receipt of a journeyman's wages, bought himself a guitar, and a book of exercises in order to teach himself to play the delightful instrument; and for Ludwig Semper himself, there came a time which, except when the taxes and the house rent happened to be due, was without a care—a time during which the early morning hours were intensely happy ones. In direct contradistinction to his behaviour in regard to most things in life, Ludwig was a consistent early riser, and the older he grew the earlier he left his

wretched couch, called by courtesy a bed. He would make himself some coffee, filling the large breakfast-cup so full that the aromatic beverage would overflow into the saucer, feast his eyes for a second or two on this evidence of a superabundance of this world's goods, eat a crisp buttered-roll, light a cigar, and then lean out at the open window for half an hour, and contemplate the morning in devout silence. For half an hour would he gaze into Morning's everlastingly youthful face, and the two would commune silently with one another and be filled with a divine tranquillity.

The better his health, the more Ludwig Semper delighted in being silent. To the despair of Rebekka very often. She herself was not at all devoted to silence, and used to complain bitterly about it both to her children and to her friends.

"Whatever's the use of that man knowing so much!" she would exclaim. "There he sits opposite you the whole evening, moving his lips about and rolling his eyes, and doesn't say a single word. And he *can* talk, I tell you. The man knows English and Greek and Spanish——"

"There, there," her husband would put in; "it's not half as bad as you make out."

It was a fortunate thing that the "Brunnenstrasse," in which the Sempers now lived, was so close to the Holstenloch. For in the Holstenloch there had been living for some weeks a little girl of nine, by name Christiane, and Asmus's little heart had been captured again. She was slim and dainty-looking, and for that Asmus admired her the more because he was plump and rotund, and had no admiration whatever for himself. She had begun by laughing at him and teasing him; but when she

had played with him once she wanted to play with him always, or if not, to chat with him. Once, for a joke, they had a wrestling match, but suddenly Asmus realised that she was a girl and weaker than himself. He let go of her, and after that would never touch any part of her but her hands. He took, however, the greatest trouble to present himself to her in the most brilliant colours. When she was present he would pretend to be a quarrelsome fellow, which was not in his line at all; and when he jumped down seven feet from the scaffolding of a new building he did it with the object of showing off before Christiane, and as an act of homage. But he also endeavoured to impress her by means more refined, *i.e.* by showing her how learned he was. In the class into which he had been moved he had learnt the names of the Sundays in Lent, and said them off to her, expecting that she would be quite overcome with admiration: "Invocavit, Reminiscere, Oculi, Lætare, Judica, Palmarum." But she exclaimed contemptuously: "Oh, I can do that too!" and went on with the names of the Sundays before Whitsuntide: "Quasimodogeniti, Misericordias Domini, Jubilate, Cantate, Rogate, Exaudi." He felt terribly depressed; these six Sundays were the very best he had to offer her. But he went to see her again every evening, and when he recited *Emilia Galotti* to her, and *Il Scraglio*, he had the best of it, it quite took away her breath, and she was filled with admiration for his talents.

CHAPTER XXII

TELLS HOW ASMUS DISCOVERED IN A BASKET THE LAND OF GOLDEN ORANGES, HOW HE WENT THROUGH FIRE AND WATER, HOW HE WAS INTRODUCED TO POLITICS, AND HOW HE BECAME A BAD BOY.

THERE was a road leading to an inn known by the name of "Der Süsse Kringel" (The Sweet Twist) which was almost prettier than the one through the Holstenloch. It traversed the moor, and the bushes on either side leant over it in such a love-lorn attitude that their branches intertwined above your head, and you could fancy you were no longer on earth but in a leafy avenue in Heaven, where birds had regained their confidence in man, and where you could live for ever without food or drink; and of one thing there was no doubt whatever, and that was that the moor was a heaven compared with the room full of dust and redolent of tobacco in which the Sempers sat making cigars. Asmus was nearly ten by this time, and was being taken more and more seriously; that is to say he was made to put on that grey linen apron and sit down at the bench with greater and greater regularity. No sooner was he home from school and had eaten a piece of bread than he had to set to work. At times he would pull himself together and work like one possessed; but there was too much work to get

through, it was quite impossible for him to finish it before supper-time. Consequently, he came to the conclusion it would be better to be consistent and to be lazy always. He developed quite a genius for laziness. He would contemplate one single tobacco-leaf long enough to enable him to distinguish it from all the other leaves. While he was stripping the centre stem he seemed to be endeavouring to find out how slowly it was possible for the human hand to move, and, before taking up the next leaf, he would follow with his eyes a cloud that was sailing by, very, very slowly, until it was quite lost to sight; or he would recite Schiller's *Cassandra* to himself, or would give a performance of *Der Freischütz* by the way; or he would think about that time when he lost himself in the snow—with that hammer in his hand, and would lose himself once again, and not be able to find his way back out of the magical silence, and would give a violent start when they called out to him and told him to get on with his work. He thought out ingenious methods of putting the unstripped tobacco-leaves out of sight, so that his task seemed to be finished. He invented the most extraordinary pretexts for getting out of the room for a minute, and, once outside, he would run the risk of a sound thrashing from Rebekka, and make his escape from the house as fast as he could, or else sneak up quietly to the loft where the big basket stood. This huge basket was quite a world in itself. One of Frau Rebekka's peculiarities was that she could not part with the smallest scrap of material or the tiniest bit of ribbon, because she was always most firmly convinced in her own mind—and she generally proved to be right—that the day would most surely arrive when it would come in handy to patch a hole in some garment 'or

other belonging to one of the children ; this basket, consequently, contained a chaotic tangle of shreds and patches, of old caps and old shoes, of trousers without seats and stockings without feet ; but it contained other things as well, back numbers of *Ueber Land und Meer* and the *Gartenlaube*, also incomplete editions of the works of Wolfgang von Goethe, Ladislav Pyrker, Baron Auffenberg, and other writers, which had been issued in parts. In this loft, under the broiling tiles, Asmus commenced to read Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, but it did not appeal to him ; on the other hand, he decided that he would read his *Science of Colours* the very next time he got the chance, and felt convinced it would be wildly interesting. On a loose leaf, which was much soiled, he found the beginning of a chapter, which ran as follows :¹—

“Know'st thou the land where citron apples bloom,
And oranges like gold in leafy gloom?”

Oh ! that was the glorious song which his father had sung years ago :—

“In caves lie coil'd the dragon's ancient brood,
The crags leap down and over it the flood.”

The song which had made him leave off playing at once because he felt he must listen to it—must listen to it with wide-open eyes. He did not ask what land it was ; it was a new land which, as soon as he heard the song, rose up out of the waters of his soul, a holy land, which, until the moment when he heard that song, he had no idea existed there. He had seen many pictures with piazzas and laurel groves, with rugged mountains and gloomy caves, but this was something quite different ; this was a land the

¹ Carlyle's translation.

like of which was not to be found on earth. He was not aware that the name of that land was the "Land of Longing."

He read on, and found that it was Italy that was referred to. "Italy," he said to himself, "that's in the South," and he pushed a box along, got up on to it, clambered up, not without some difficulty, to the sloping skylight and peered out. "That is the South over there," he said to himself, "and Italy is over there," and he gazed into the southern sky, and said to himself:

"A gentle wind from deep blue heaven blows,
The myrtle thick, and high the laurel grows."

Then suddenly he heard a loud voice behind him:—

"Did any one ever hear of such a thing!" called out Johannes. "There are we sitting down below, and can't get on with the work because there are no leaves ready, and Mr. Lazybones is sitting up there and snapping at flies! Will you be so very kind, my lord, as to come down as quickly as ever you can?" and Asmus stole away from the land of oranges and returned to his chamber of torture. If he could only have succeeded in giving all his attention to his work, he would have had no difficulty, at any rate, in getting through the time. But to do the same thing over and over again a thousand times in one hour! That was more than he was equal to, and so by his laziness he made the time a hundredfold longer, and his torture a thousandfold greater. For his conscience tormented him too. He said to himself, very clearly and distinctly:—

"It is horrid of you not to help your father."

But even that did not have the effect of making him work. And this father of his would often take

off his fetters when he least expected it, and let him go free. Those were fat years, you see, and Ludwig Semper was more than usually reckless. His glance would often go sideways towards his lazy, melancholy-looking little son, and many a time he would say, "There, be off with you," which invariably transformed the melancholy Asmus, who had been glued to a tobacco-leaf, into a flash of lightning, but which just as invariably met with decided disapproval from Rebekka.

"What will that boy come to?" she would ask. "You actually encourage him to be lazy! You intend making a count of him, I suppose!" At which Ludwig Semper would laugh, perhaps, and cry out:

"Sunt pueri pueri, pueri puerilia tractant!" and to that Rebekka could not demur.

But the occasions on which this happened were as rare as is sunshine in a Hamburg November. As business was "brilliant," and Ludwig Semper was in a position to employ two journeymen in addition to Johannes, there was a great quantity of stripping to be done. His whole life long, the little prisoner retained a grateful recollection of the fiery deliverer who arrived one day in the form of a vivid flash of lightning, and melted off his fetters. The lightning was followed almost instantaneously by a clap of thunder that sounded as if a wooden building as big as the world had fallen to the ground with a crash. Johannes went quite white, and said:

"Something must have been struck by lightning!" And a minute later, when he had looked out of the window, he shouted out:

"A fire! a fire! a big fire!" It must be at the Riding School," and then he rushed out of the house. The other journeymen followed him. Asmus, however,

was ahead of them all. A quarter of an hour later, in his leisurely, dignified way, Ludwig Semper went stalking after them. Asmus took off his wooden shoes and ran through the streets in his stockings; whenever he did that his swiftness vied with that of the eagle in its flight. The lightning had struck a thatched barn full of corn, and the fire had spread to the dwelling-house and to the stables, which were also thatched. It was the first time Asmus had seen a building on fire. He could not take his eyes off the wolves and dragons springing up into the sky from the cauldrons of hell, as it were, ever faster and more furiously, and in numbers ever increasing—off the snakes that went hissing up out of the windows—off the vultures with their long red necks hopping along the copings and beating their wings rapaciously. He saw the flames run along the beams, and then burst out suddenly at some fresh place, and he thought: "Just like dogs gnawing voraciously at a bone and then dashing off to something that looks more tempting, and which other dogs are tearing at. Now, the greedy, jealous creatures fly snarling at one another, and snap at each other's throats with yelping jaws, and then begin to struggle again as to who can gorge the fastest." And he never takes his own glowing eyes off the glowing eyes of the beasts. The heat is so great that it almost singes his eyebrows; but he does not move back, even by a hair's-breadth. For does he not see in the empty spaces where the windows used to be, battles raging between the smoke and the flames?—smoke-grey hydras and chimeras curl and uncurl their thick tails as they rush forward with mad impetuosity, broad golden swords lunge into them, and cloudily the steaming red blood wells out. Then in red-hot fury they all whirl round, coil them-

selves about, fly at one another, and are tangled together in inextricable confusion, until you think the end of the world must surely have come. Then down tumbles a wall, and like the Furies the flames dash the shreds of their mantles into the face of the moon, which, pale and trembling, comes out to see what is going on. "Ho!" thought Asmus, "if only that big gable end would fall down into it, then the flames would flare up higher still. Oh! they really must go higher and higher, ever so much higher!" and his heart flew up with the flames.

But after a wild, triumphant time, good fortune forsakes one. In falling, the wall extinguished a great part of the fire, and then the Volunteer Fire-Brigade appeared upon the scene and went hunting about eagerly for a fire-plug into which to screw the hose. It was a very plucky fire-brigade, and it was not at all nice of the village people to persist in calling it that "aggravating" fire-brigade. They asserted that the reason why the "aggravating" ones practised so often without any visible object was that they might have practice at thirst-quenching at Peter Ramm's public-house, for after every fire-brigade practice a fearful epidemic of heart-burn was sure to rage in Oldensund. But the cause of all this was merely that well-known feeling of envy and malice with which all those who do not hold some official post or other are in the habit of taking their revenge on officials and institutions. It must be confessed, however, that the "aggravating" ones would never have succeeded in getting the better of that fire if it had not come to their aid by going out of its own accord.

It is not to be wondered at that day after day, from this time forth, whenever he was sitting in front of his tobacco-leaves, and every hour seemed to him an

eternity, it is not to be wondered at, I say, that Asmus was always on the look-out for the flash of lightning that would set him free. At that particular fire no one had been killed, or even injured, and that was a condition Asmus insisted on: human beings must not be burnt to death, neither must animals; for the rest, there might be a fire every day as far as he was concerned—of course after four o'clock in the afternoon if it could be managed, when school was over and the shades of night were beginning their reign. But the lightning went where it listed, and did not trouble itself about the wishes and woes of little Asmus.

But one day the report went round that on Horsmann's wharf, on the Elbe, some considerable distance off, people were being allowed to pick up chips—as many as they could carry away. It was not necessary to tell the economically-minded Rebekka anything of that kind more than once! Alfred and Asmus were sent off with sacks without any delay, and once again Asmus Semper's heart shouted aloud for joy at liberty regained. On the way, though nothing actually took place, though there was nothing to attract his attention but the quietly flowing river, he had an experience, and this experience was one of the greatest he ever had in his life. He saw the Elbe for the first time.

For more than nine years he had dwelt on this little spot of earth, and thousands of times had its loveliness been brought home to him; but now for the first time he realised its grandeur. For the first time he saw the great river that, because it is not pretty and lively like the Rhine, but calm and big, is so much less talked and sung about both in and outside the German land. The Rhine has the frank, ingenuous cheeriness of the German; the Elbe

his meditative, thoughtful melancholy. But the Rhine flows only through the western part of Germany; the Elbe through the centre of its heart. While, at its full the Rhine is the personification of joyousness as it whirls and dances and skips along, the Elbe at its full is the personification of blissful serenity. On the Rhine, is heard the sound of song and the clink, clink of glasses; on the Elbe, a wind-mill turns its sails without a sound, and with a silence as great the stream carries its light burden of gently swaying little skiffs and the heavy one of colossal ships. Into the Rhine look down rocks and ruins of ancient castles; along the Elbe rustle softly the spacious gardens of those merchant princes who, when sneered at for being shopkeepers, were wont to smile so quietly, the amount of whose leisure equalled that of their business, and whose parks possess one advantage denied to the garden of kings—the advantage of grandiose, large-winged poesy. As you sail along round the twists and turns of the Rhine you are teased and laughed at by ever-changing pictures—pictures which look at you suddenly for an instant and then as suddenly hide themselves again. But the Elbe is so broad that you cannot see its shores, and in the evening, when it empties itself into the sea, sky, land, and river merge into one great glory. And the Elbe breathes slowly, its broad bosom rises and sinks: as it sinks, isles of silence come into view, green and silvery isles, isles of pure, innocent happiness on which neither man nor beast can find an abiding-place, and whose silvery grass the sun turns into gold: as it rises, they disappear from view as silently as they appeared. And when they are no longer to be seen, the eyes feast on scenes of loveliness that cannot be surpassed, and which glide along

through our memories like veils of soft filmy mist that melt away in the sunlight, and we ask ourselves: "Where was it that we were once so happy? Wherever could it have been?"

Alfred explained to his brother all that was to be seen on the banks of the river: that was Hanoverian land, there lay Harburg, and those blue hills behind were the Haake Hills—on those hills grew any quantity of bilberries, that was why they were so blue; and Finkenwarder was there, and over there was Cranz. But not one single word did Asmus hear, for he was not there; by that time he was standing on the silvery isles. For the first time in his life he saw the life-giving stream of his home and felt its beauty; and then when, through the gap close to the "Half Moon," they actually went down to the river itself, and Asmus had lain for an hour or more on the sand on the shore, he had lain for the first time on the maternal bosom of his natal land, and had sucked in deep draughts which filled him with a love for her that was to last for ever and ever.

The report proved to be correct: the children were allowed to stuff their sacks full of chips and shavings on the wharf, and they found six or seven people hard at work already. In the general excitement and confusion, it would happen every now and again that some one of them would let a very considerable sized bit of board slip into his sack, an act which in technical language was called "getting a splinter into your finger," and many a toiler did not worry at all about the splinter,¹ especially when he had a beam in his eye. After all, the boundary line between a splinter and a beam is by no means a well-defined

¹ The word "mote" in the English translation of the Bible is "splitter" (splinter) in the German translation.

one : where does the splinter end and the beam begin ? For all that, Asmus confined his attention to undoubted splinters ; for he considered it horribly mean to rob a nice kind man who had given them permission to pick up things ; but to keep himself out of temptation he turned his thoughts in another direction. He pictured to himself that he had been caught in the act ; he could always draw upon his imagination to any extent, and it seemed to him that he would have died at once from sheer fright and shame. Besides, the vision of the prison with the iron bars and the poisoned dump-lings had not as yet faded quite out of his mind.

If it was one hour's journey from the Brunnen-strasse to the wharf when the sacks were empty, it was two when the sacks were full and your heart was heavy with the sorrow of parting. Panting and perspiring, Asmus tramped along under his heavy load with its hundred and one sharp corners and edges, but what was that compared with the delight of tripping along the Elbe Road, which has not its like in any part of the world, of listening to all the sounds from the gardens so far below him which the birch-trees hid from his view, and of sauntering past the "Half Moon" down the path between the rocks, which was spanned by a soundless bridge over, which he never saw pass foot of man or beast ? "What was it compared with the bliss of looking into the eyes of the Elbe ?" And more than all this, what a feather's weight seemed even the heaviest of sacks if one escaped from that tobacco-room, where one could not stop coughing, and writhed about in agony with longing to be free.

It was a peculiar coincidence that just at this time, when he was feeling such an intense love for his native place, Asmus should make the acquaintance

of the Red Internationals. In the yard behind the building in which the Sempers dwelt there was a small house in which lived the "Minute Cobbler." If you took this man a pair of boots to mend, whether you asked him to be quick about them or not, he invariably said, with genial vehemence: "In a minute, in a minute!", and therefore he was nicknamed the "Minute Cobbler," in contradistinction to the "Everlasting Joiner" who supplied nearly all the coffins required in Oldensund. But whereas the Everlasting Joiner always delivered his goods at the time promised, the Minute Cobbler had the peculiarity never by any chance to have your boots ready when you called for them. So Asmus had occasionally to wait when he went to get his boots, and on such occasions it happened every now and again that he heard the cobbler's wife—a big-boned, formidable-looking person—reading aloud from the *Social Democrat*; she read about "Organisthashun" and "Refolushun," about the cowardice of the "Buhrjoysie" and about "Bricklayers' Striks," and when she came to passages that were stronger and more impressive than usual she seemed to foam at the mouth.

The boy loathed this woman with his whole soul; but as he always snatched at things intellectual when they came in his way, he listened to her with both his ears, and was soon convinced that the people who wrote in that paper must have been treated with horrible injustice, and that the people who brought such accusations against them must be awfully bad men. And if he heard that one of them had been sent to prison little Asmus's heart would jump into his throat, and he could have wept that such a shameful thing should have been allowed to take place with impunity.

In that house in the courtyard at the back there

lived, in addition to the cobbler, a tall, thin man, said to be a writer, who had a bed-ridden wife. Consequently it happened that he was often to be seen crossing the street with a basket on his arm and a milk-jug in his hand, on his way to do the shopping, which under ordinary circumstances falls to the lot of women.

Moreover, as this man with the sad-looking face when he was about this business usually wore a tight-fitting coat with long tails, and a top-hat, it is not surprising that the street Arabs took a considerable amount of interest in him. His name was Bunger, and a fat, unwashed wit thought one day of the splendid rhyme :

“Herr Bunger,
Have you hunger !”

From that time the man could not put his nose out of doors without having this question put to him by a disorderly chorus, and as, unfortunately, the man had a sensitive nature, he was so foolish as to turn round and remonstrate with them, and as the only result of this was increased persecution he condescended to offer money to the worst of his tormentors to induce them to leave him in peace. The natural consequence was that he never had any peace again ; for there is nothing that can equal in cruelty a compact mass of children. Even Asmus, who had evidently been spoilt by good luck, called out one day when he caught sight of the man :

“Herr Bunger,
Have you hunger !”

Then Herr Bunger turned round very slowly, fixed his great sad eyes on Asmus, shook his head very slowly and reprovingly, and proceeded on his way. Asmus

flushed all over ; the look the man had bestowed upon him gave him a dreadful shock ; he did not utter another sound, and stole away on tiptoe. He never shouted out the rhyme again, and a time was to come when he would repent most bitterly that he had ever done so.

CHAPTER XXIII

TREATS OF THE IMPERATOR RÖSING AND HIS BODY-GUARD: OF CANINGS, OF A HYMN-BOOK, AND OF THE CATECHISM AS THE THREE CHIEF MEANS OF EDUCATION.

FOR about Easter-time, Asmus had naturally been moved up into the middle grade of the three-graded Village School. And the life there was a totally different affair to what it had been in Herr Schulz's stormy class. Herr Rösing was well advanced in years, and looked like an old, shrivelled-up country parson, and in his class life resembled a river-bed in which the water creeps sleepily along, and in which during the greater part of the year there is no water at all. Life there might also be compared to a dying tree only one branch of which is still alive. This one green branch was Herr Rösing's caligraphy. To write beautifully was the one thing he was capable of, and he made it very clear to his pupils that this was the one and only art to which any importance ought to be attached. "My boys," he would say every morning and every afternoon,—“my boys, learn to write well! A good handwriting will carry you over any number of stiles. If a man writes well, there is no need for him to be clever; he finds open doors in all directions.” Thus, Herr Rösing, when he ought to have been teaching science, taught them nothing but caligraphy.

He had another reason, too, for this preference: while he was giving the lesson there was no necessity for him to let his beautiful meerschaum pipe go out. In the whole course of his life science had never had any very great attraction for Herr Rösing. His knowledge of arithmetic, for instance, ended with the Rule of Three, and during the whole of the three years Asmus sat at the feet of that man, every arithmetic lesson commenced by his writing a few Rule of Three sums on the black-board and then setting light to his pipe. In accordance with a tradition in the class you had to multiply the second and third term together and divide by the first. One boy would tell that to the other, and any boy who could not do the sums after he had been told it copied from his neighbour. Asmus inquired of Herr Rösing, one day, why it was that you had to multiply and divide. Herr Rösing was disagreeably surprised, and exclaimed: "That is quite clear, youngster; it's the way it's always done," and Asmus sat down again, looking very much enlightened. But there is another kind of Rule of Three which is very horrid, and that is the Rule of Three Inverse, when the terms are the other way about. You set to work merrily, and make out that ten men take much longer to drink a barrel of beer than one man, as if it were a sort of fairy-tale. There was only one boy who was able to do these sums correctly: namely, the stalwart son of the Everlasting Joiner, and he had been taught by his father. Herr Rösing refused to let the cat out of the bag, and when Asmus asked him how it was possible to tell the difference, he smiled slyly, and said rather maliciously: "Y-e-e-e-s, just think it over, you are sharp enough generally!" If he had let out this, his last secret, there would have been an end once for all of his intellectual supremacy, and therefore

he was very careful not to. But these inverted relations left Asmus no peace; he appealed to the joiner's son, and he was unselfish enough to unveil the mystery.

Asmus showed his gratitude by helping the joiner's son with his grammar. The only boys between whom there was any competition during these grammar lessons of Herr Rösing's, which took place at very rare intervals, were Asmus Semper and Friedrich Heilmann, the boy who sat next to him; the other sixty or seventy pupils did not exert themselves in the least to try and understand anything. The reason for this was that if circumstances forced him to refer to them Herr Rösing expressed himself in a very mystical way with regard to things grammatical, in such an exceedingly mystical way, in fact, that not being at all clear in his own mind about the matter in hand, he was usually taken quite by surprise whenever Friedrich or Asmus comprehended anything he was attempting to teach them. And when they asserted most emphatically that that word was the object and the other the attribute, and his book told him they were quite right, he could not forbear exclaiming, in honest admiration: "You are a *baas*! you're famous fellows, both of you!"

Herr Rösing's usual manner of giving a German lesson was to dictate something from a book while he smoked. The book and the pipe in his left hand, and in his right a wonderful new cane, very long and thick, he would saunter along between the forms, and wherever he succeeded in discovering a glaring mistake the long cane would wind itself lovingly round the culprit's body. Asmus's visual memory was an almost absolutely reliable one. Having once seen a word he never wrote it wrong again, and as he had read a

good deal, any and every sort of dictation was mere child's play to him. He was the only one who could spell the word "Vieh" (cattle, and is pronounced "fee"). He had to perform this trick over and over again for the benefit of the class, and each time, after he had accomplished it successfully, all the spectators having been breathless with excitement the while, as if it had been a leap for life on a trapeze, Herr Rösing would shout out: "There's a *baas!*" There were other occasions, though, when that yellow cane flourished for Asmus. Once, for instance, when Herr Rösing was feeling particularly energetic, the audacious idea entered his head that he would give his pupils a task to do at home! such as to copy out, for example, Krummacher's *Robin-Redbreast* as beautifully as possible. Now Asmus had never been able to make up his mind as to which he detested doing most, stripping tobacco or copying something out of a book; consequently, at a rough estimate, after he had fetched the inkstand it took him about half an hour to get to the end of the first sentence. For while he was painting in:—" *One winter when the cold was very great, a robin redbreast came to the window of a pious farmer,*"—dreaminess descended upon him as heavily and as softly as heavy, large-flaked snow comes down on mild winter days. So good a poet was that old-fashioned Herr Krummacher that in the middle of summer the little boy was completely snowed up in a second, and could see a little window with a thick frame of snow round it, and just outside the window a little bird with its little feet buried in the snow, and looking out of the window dear, round, German faces, their warm breath dimming the window-panes. Later on Asmus found that a man whose name was Ludwig Richter had drawn pictures just like those he

had seen and dreamt a thousand times at home and in the fields, amid summer's cheerful sounds and winter's peaceful silence. After he had written another half sentence, he had had quite enough of the whole thing; with a sudden burst of gaiety he shut up his exercise-book with a bang—without even putting a piece of blotting-paper between the pages—beat upon it a little tattoo with both his little fists, and rushed away, out into the open air. It was very seldom that Herr Rösing inquired whether his orders had been obeyed; but if he did happen to notice, by chance, how Asmus had been behaving with regard to his duty and his exercise-book, Herr Rösing's pedagogy would come down with a swish on the culprit's back, and then the matter would be settled once for all. The pain lasted three minutes at the most; the work, which was such torture to him, would have lasted two hours. It did not require any great amount of intellect to discern which of the two trials was the easier to bear.

Of the sorrows and sufferings which the two years spent in Herr Rösing's class brought the boy, these canings were the very least. The reading lessons were far harder to bear. They never read anything but hymns. When the nine hundred and more hymns in the hymn-book were finished, they would begin again with the first one, and not one single boy ever had any idea of the meaning of, or felt his heart touched by, those hymns. The only help the master gave in the matter was—when he considered a boy had read enough—to take his pipe out of his mouth and say: "Next one!" In little Semper's heart, in the course of those three years, a rubbish heap was deposited over religious poetry, and before a plant could find its way through the stony

mass and lift up its head towards the light, a miracle had to be performed. And even worse was Dr. Martin Luther's Catechism; for that you had to learn by heart, and even when you were asleep the dread you had of it still weighed heavily upon you. Herr Rösing would stick his finger somewhere into the class, as if he were sticking a key into a clock to wind it up, and then the wheels would go whirring round:—

“How is it that water is able to do such great things? It is not the water that does it, but the Word of God which is with and in the water, and the faith which trusts in this Same Word of God in the water; for without the Word of God the water is bad water and is not a Baptism; but with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is a water of life full of grace, and a laver of regeneration through the Holy Spirit; as St. Paul says to Titus in the third chapter: ‘According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying.’”

And if you had offered Asmus ten Schiller-sticks and twenty books and thirty apples, and a new theatre and a violin, and freedom evermore from the work of stripping tobacco, on condition that he should tell you approximately what those words really meant, he could not have managed it. So it is evident that religious education had no fiercer enemy than this method of imparting it, and in this case Herr

Rösing was not so very much to blame. In Asmus's home there was complete indifference with regard to all questions of religion, except that now and again, as occasion offered, Rebekka Semper would say something severe about "those priests." When he was at home the word "religion" meant for Asmus something to which not the least importance need be attached, and when he was at school an utterly overwhelming accumulation of spiritual torture.

But even this religious instruction was not the worst thing he had to endure. His greatest trouble was that he was different from the other boys.

If in Herr Schulz's class—that splendid, adorable Herr Schulz—almost as much time had been given to changing places as to instruction, in Herr Rösing's there was never any changing of places at all. All the same there was an order of precedence in the class, but that order was settled once for all. In the highest places sat the boys whom Herr Rösing was afraid of, or whose fathers or mothers he was afraid of. Once upon a time, a stalwart fellow whom he had been about to give a thrashing to, had snatched the cane out of his hand and had turned the tables on him. Henceforth he treated all boys of the same description with the greatest affection and respect. Consequently the front forms were filled with splendid-looking fellows with faces that were expressive of the greatest firmness, and there was a fair number of them too, for at that time the corporal development of the young folk of Oldensund was in advance of their intellectual development. There would have been a "palace revolution" if any attempt had been made to displace these Strelitzers or Prætorians. The only exception to this rule was the son of the Everlasting Joiner, who, despite his strength and size, always

sat in the middle of the class, because he was so good-natured and had such a peaceable disposition. But the primus of the class gave promise of becoming an ox with regard to both his strength and his intelligence; his name was Klaus Rampuhn, and, though he was only thirteen, you would have judged from his eyes and mouth that he would be quite willing to kill a man for a halfpenny.

As Herr Rösing never required anything whatever from his bodyguard, and even went so far as to let them off the Catechism, they treated him in return with a certain amount of consideration. They did not take him seriously in any way, however. Whenever he turned his back to them, they would fasten little paper kites on to the buttons of his coat-tails, or they would pull out his coloured pocket-handkerchief and wipe their pens on it, so that afterwards he would go about with a black smear on his nose; but on the whole they treated him with kindness and benevolence, more especially so because on urgent occasions the headmaster, Herr Cremer, would come to his assistance, and corporal superiority was a matter of which he took no account whatever. Towards their weaker school-fellow, however, the Strelitzers made use of all the privileges of absolute rule, and Klaus Rampuhn more particularly soon began to evince a weird interest in Asmus Semper, who was still very short for his age.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRÆTORIANS' REVENGE AND THE TREACHERY OF BRUTUS.

THE "inherent justice of things" is so great that foolish people, even though they hold the highest posts and cannot be turned out of them, always feel ridiculously irritated and annoyed by the greater ability of those in inferior positions. Not that they have any wish to be clever themselves, but they object to others being so. The Prætorians had all of them been studying for several years under Herr Rösing, and they had infected the whole class with that peace of mind which under such a teacher will soon take possession of a whole troop of pupils. Some new-comers had now arrived who showed themselves desirous of introducing innovations. Boys who had been trained under Herr Schulz shot up from the forms, and shouted out: "I know it, teacher, I know it!" and Heilmann and Asmus especially were so abominably lively that even Herr Rösing's narcotic instruction could not send them to sleep. Every minute you heard: "There's a *baas*!" and "There's a splendid fellow!" until Klaus Rampuhn could stand it no longer. He mobilised the body-guard, and they commenced proceedings by skirmishing in the distance. When the two lively ones

appeared there would be a shout of: "Look there, there are the *baase*! Hullo! there are the splendid fellows!" Friedrich Heilmann, however, was a diplomat, he made the best of a bad bargain, went over at once to the bodyguard and made friends with them. Asmus would rather have died than have done that! He liked nothing better than to be teased and chaffed; but as soon as he felt that any one had hostile feelings towards him, in a second he would become outwardly as cold as ice! This shabby little son of a cigar-maker actually had the impertinence to be proud, too! More than once he had refused to obey Klaus Rampuhn's orders! Asmus Semper and Klaus Rampuhn! They were undoubtedly two of those human beings who, the very first time they see each other, feel that there is a wide gulf between them that will never be bridged over. But at present the quarrel was only smouldering, a whole quantity of fuel was heaped up, but there was no air to fan the red glow into flames, no outlet for it. At last, however, a fur cap caused the gas, of which a large amount had developed, to explode.

Marianne Semper's mistress had given her a very handsome and very tall fur cap which had been discarded by its owner, and she had passed it on to her little brother. Asmus was radiant with delight, and because it was such a beautiful thing in itself, and because he had no other cap that was fit to wear, he went to school in it one glorious June morning. That gave the fire the air it required to make it blaze up. No sooner did he appear than he was greeted with a storm of hurrahs. He was asked if he was afraid of catching a cold in his head, and because the cap was such a tall one they inquired if he had a

top flat to let. That was too much for Asmus's risible faculties, he had to laugh, but he was glad when school began and there was an end of the matter.

Meanwhile, he had forgotten the recreation interval. In the playground the boys formed a big circle round him, and as his only reply to their teasing was to go on eating his bread without saying a word, Klaus Rampuhn snatched off his cap from behind, and then it was passed round the circle from hand to hand. Asmus protested energetically, and demanded his cap back again. Then the fun commenced; the cap began to fly about. It flew up in the air far above their heads, and the whole school took part in the affair. It fell into the mud, and the boy standing nearest to it kicked it up again with his foot. It flew backwards and forwards over the whole of the spacious playground, sometimes in this direction, sometimes in that, and Asmus ran panting after it, endeavouring to regain possession of his precious piece of finery. But the harder he ran, and the more he tried to catch hold of it, the wilder became the chase, until at last he gave it up in despair, and stood quite still with the tears rolling down his cheeks. Then, at last, one of the boys, seized hold of the cap and stuck it on his head, and, full of dirt as it was, pressed it down over both ears. He tore it off, and when he saw in what condition was the one and only article of dress he possessed that was at all nice to look at he broke out into loud sobs.

The next day, he took off his cap just before he got to school, stuffed it into his pocket, and entered the forecourt bareheaded. But that did not mend matters in the least. A sharp boy very soon spied

out where Asmus had hidden the comical object; he managed to get it away from its owner on the sly, and the game of football recommenced. Asmus looked on with trembling heart and clenched fists; but when one of the boys shoved the cap away with a look of disgust on his face, and inquired in a loud voice how they were to know it was not alive, Asmus could contain himself no longer. He made a rush for the boy who had insulted him so horribly. But before he could reach him some one threw a handful of sand into his face. He gave a loud scream and put both his hands up to his eyes.

If he had complained to the master it would only have made matters worse. The schoolboys' code of honour forbids the telling of tales. He endeavoured to settle the affair in another way; no matter what the weather he went to school without a cap. But he was soon to become conscious of the fact that it was himself and not his cap that excited such universal interest. Both in schools and in barracks, combinations of this description are on the look-out for a victim who will afford them some amusement, and woe betide him in whose appearance there is anything out of the common, woe betide him who lets loose the Furies by means of an unseasonable cap; they never let him alone again. If he had been a great big fellow, with powerful fists, the question could, of course, have been settled on the spot. But he was small, and had only two insignificant little arms. So all the cruelty that was in them the boys let out on poor little Asmus.

They knocked up against him on purpose so that he tumbled over, and when he got up they reproached another one indignantly with having done it; they pulled his hair, and stuck the steel nibs of their pens into

him, and when he turned round they looked the picture of innocence. They criticised unmercifully his scanty clothing, they made comments on the answers he had given during the lesson, and remarked that he was a terribly stupid fellow. When he was eating they knocked the bread out of his hand—by accident apparently—or threw sand or dirt on to it. And, strange to say, the sleepest boys during school hours were now the liveliest, the loudest, and the most inventive; and the most trying thing of all to Asmus was that he was never left alone for a single instant, that the moment the master's back was turned he felt that the attention of all the boys was focused on him, and would continue to be.

He tried a hundred ways of escaping from this torture. If Herr Rösing called him *baas*, or praised him in any way, he always had a particularly bad time during the next recreation interval. So he made up his mind not to answer at all during the lesson, and to pretend to be stupid. But he could not manage it. When his interest was excited he lost all control over himself. He thought: "If I implore them to leave me in peace, and make friends with them by being very nice to them, there will be an end of it." But the mere idea of so lowering himself caused him to set his teeth and clench his fists. He would rather have bitten off his tongue.

At home, he never breathed a word of his troubles. The Semperian silence closed his lips. They would not possibly be able to understand how it had all come about, and how painfully it affected him; neither did he feel that he could give at all a correct description of the true state of affairs. And when he had been in the peaceful atmosphere of his home for ten minutes he would forget all about school,

and Ludwig Semper's reckless poetic temperament would get the upper hand in him. And then he would wander again along the banks of the river. Singing, he would throw the sack over his shoulders and would trot down to his big, soft-armed Mother Elbe; and when he saw the ships sailing away in the distance he would think how strange it was that he had once been so happy for no reason at all! At such and such a time—on such and such a day—just after noon—at a moment when nothing in the least interesting was happening—a wonderful sense of happiness had taken possession of his soul, why, he had no idea—he had wished for nothing and no wish had been fulfilled. And once again, in retrospection, he enjoyed one of those mysterious festivals of the soul which come and go in accordance with some higher ordinance beyond our comprehension.

Then, when he awoke the next morning, and remembered he had to go to school, it was as if a cruel fist had dealt a blow straight at his heart, and had then squeezed it with hard, rough fingers. He used to go to school by all sorts of roundabout ways so that he might meet no one, and wait until the very last minute so that he might enter the class-room just before the master. When school was over he used to linger until all the other boys had gone out, so that he might creep out by himself; but they were never in a hurry, they would lie in wait for him outside, and walk along beside him. Then he used to try to get out first and run off home as quickly as possible; but they could run much faster than he was able to in his wooden shoes, and soon caught him up. Once he pretended to have a cold as an excuse for staying in during the recreation

interval, but the Strelitzers explained to Herr Rösing that Semper had not a cold at all, but that he was too lazy to go out; so Herr Rösing sent him out. And if he did manage to stay in the room they would come in again and torment him there, which was worse than in the open air. And when his soul was fluttering about like a frightened bird, and he was making all these attempts to escape, he was continually telling himself: "You're a coward—you're a coward!" and the feeling that that was the case made him sick unto death. At last he could bear it no longer, and told his troubles to Herr Rösing. He listened to him, took his pipe out of his mouth, and said:

"What nonsense, you must manage to get on together. You're in fault yourself too, I expect. You're a quarrelsome boy."

Asmus felt as if he had received a blow on his chest. He quarrelsome? He pick a quarrel with Klaus Rampuhn? and with those other big, strong fellows? A flood of bitterness welled up suddenly in little Asmus's heart and overflowed the banks; a sense of something to which, until that moment, he had been an utter stranger, a sense of great injustice poisoned him. True, his mother was unjust to him occasionally, but he knew that she loved him all the same. But this man was an administrator of justice; it was his duty to be just, and he could pass such a sentence as that! For some few seconds his heart was overflowing with an unnatural feeling of hatred against his master. For the first time in his life Asmus Semper had received a heavy blow on the most sensitive spot in his soul, and the mark it left was a deep one.

The outcome of the accusation he had made was

that the torture commenced anew, and with increased severity ; and, what was worse still, he was hissed and sneered at for being a tell-tale, a babbler, and a traitor. And a still greater trouble was in store for him. Friedrich Heilmann, his fellow *baas* and confidential friend, went over openly to the enemy's superior force. One morning Asmus caught sight of him laughing and jeering at him in the ranks of his tormentors. At first Asmus could not make it out at all. He tried to believe his eyes must have deceived him, but when, on the way home, he endeavoured to get an explanation from his faithless friend, the latter ran away at such a rapid rate that it seemed as if his conscience had turned into a steam-engine. Some considerable time afterwards, when Asmus read in Shakespeare how Cæsar cried out as he fell : "*Et tu, Brute ?*" and covered his face with his mantle, he thought of Friedrich Heilmann, and comprehended vividly the feelings of Mark Antony when he said : "*This was the most unkindest cut of all.*"

And yet worse was to come : on another occasion he saw Heilmann and several of the Strelitzers putting their heads together. Heilmann was speaking, and the others were listening eagerly. Something or other seemed to be passing from mouth to mouth, and then all at once he heard all around him twenty or thirty throats yelling out :

"Trudel, Trudel, Trudel ! Hohoooo, Trudel ! Hurrah, Trudel ! what's *Fidelio* up to ? Trudel, sing us something from the *Trombadur*, hoooooooooooo ! . . . Trudel, Trudel, Trudel, Trudel ! . . ."

Asmus went white as a sheet. In the innocence of his heart he had confided to his friend Heilmann the name he was called by at home, and with happy

pride had told him all about his father, about all the things he could do, how beautifully he could sing bits from *Fidelio*, and from the *Troubadour*, and from all the operas, and how beautifully he could read aloud. . . . All this Heilmann had repeated to his enemies! What a horrible difference there was in the sound of his pet name when it came out of their throats! At home it was a term of endearment; here it was an insult. When his own people called him by it he felt as if he were being stroked; here it was like a whip lashing his face and his heart. Tender affection had invented the name, and brutal cruelty uttered the word in a tone that made it sound like infernal music composed of brutality, hatred, insolence, and malice. How pleased he had been, and how he had laughed the first time his brother had called him "Trudel," and now this name was to stick to him like a stigma through the whole of his school-life. A man with a nickname loses his identity; he carries about with him on his back a spectre that is the double of himself, and hatred and uncharitableness, when it pleases them, notice only the spectre and pay no attention to the man.

He made up his mind a hundred times to treat their hooting and howling with silent contempt, but that had no effect whatever. It only annoyed them, and acted as an incentive to further ill-treatment. They knew that there must be an end to his patience, and they made up their minds not to leave off until they had put him into a furious passion and made him cry. The very next day, by means of this new form of torture, they irritated him to such an extent that he lost his self-control and went for Klaus Rampuhn. In a perfect fury of passion, with clenched fists, he sprang forward to kill him. It was

more like flying than springing; but Klaus had but to give him a blow with his fists, smiling coldly the while, and little Asmus was lying on his back on the ground, and blood was flowing from his nose and his mouth.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW ASMUS PRAYED, AND HOW A QUEEN APPEARED
TO HIM. HOW HE FELL FROM A LADDER AND
BECAME A POET.

THAT day, as soon as he reached home, he crept into his bedroom on tiptoe, and closed the door very gently behind him. He had never prayed before; in his home no one prayed; at school they had prayers now and again, but then they were said by Herr Rösing. Asmus folded his hands and said:

‘ Dear God, do not let them torment me so dreadfully any more. I can’t bear it any longer. I will always be good and industrious. I promise I will. Make them leave off tormenting me, and if Thou canst not, let me die; I really cannot bear it any longer. I have never done them any harm! Why are they always so cruel to me? I am quite sure I didn’t begin it? . . . ”

Suddenly he broke off and stared straight in front of him. He saw Herr Bunger, and heard himself calling out:

“ Herr Bunger,
Have you hunger! ”

saw the man he was jeering at turn round and slowly shake his head; saw, too, his great sad-looking eyes; and very quietly and slowly Asmus slunk away

from God, and closed the door behind him. Words cannot describe how wretched he felt.

Even though he could not express it clearly in his own mind, he realised the awful justice of fate. As a rule fate seems to trouble itself very little as to whether we have been at fault or not, it punishes us when we are innocent, yes, even when we have done what is right, and this doubt of the justice of fate's decrees adds to our punishment the horrors of doubt and perplexity.

But a soft, gentle light was about to glimmer through the darkness of those days, a soft and yet strangely powerful light. One morning when there was no school Asmus suddenly saw, spread out before his mind's eye, that green meadow in the hollow, and seemed to smell its fragrance—that meadow in the hollow between the railway embankments, which he had not seen since they had left their house on the "Rain." A sudden longing for that meadow came over him, and for that land where Abraham had walked in the presence of God, where Eliezer had found Rebekah, and where Rebekah's son saw in a dream the angels of God descending and ascending the ladder of light; across which, too, the caravan had passed which Orbasan, the Lord of the Desert, had joined, and where all those fairy-tales had taken place, from *Caliph Stork* to the *False Prince*. He was driven there by an impulse he could not resist; he rushed off as fast as his legs would carry him, and when he reached his destination he found everything as of old. For a whole hour he did nothing but sit on the grass, or stand in the lane dreamily stroking a branch, or looking into the far distance with a smile on his face. On his way home he had to pass the tavern that was situated just

where the railway embankment divided and went off into two different directions, and as he was passing he saw a striking-looking little girl sitting on one of the stone steps leading up to the door.

She was not a round-faced, flaxen-headed, red-and-white child, like the majority of the children in Holstein; she was quite different. Her eyes and her hair were dark brown, and her face, which was rather long and narrow, was brown like,—Asmus considered who it could have been who had a complexion like that,—yes, that was it—like Christel Bellièvre. “She looks French,” he thought. She did not move when he stared at her, but returned his gaze with great calm eyes. Her long slim hands were folded on her lap, and her whole attitude led one to believe that she had been accustomed to sadness and sorrow all her life.

“Have you lost your way?” he asked.

She shook her head and said, “No.”

“You are tired, that’s all that’s the matter with you, isn’t it?”

“No, I am waiting for my papa.”

The door of the tavern was open, and at that moment loud shouts of laughter came towards them, and at the sound the little girl knitted her straight dark eyebrows as if something hurt her.

“Would you like to be inside?” asked Asmus.

Her only answer was a slight shudder.

“I like being in a tavern,” said Asmus. “My father took me into one once, and gave me a whole glassful of seltzer water with some raspberry vinegar in it. That’s good, I can tell you.”

She looked at him straight in the face with a scrutinising glance.

“Is your papa good to you?” she asked.

Asmus gave an amused laugh.

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "My father is the best man in all the world."

She knit her brows again, looked past him and was silent.

"That's very pretty," he said after a time, pointing to a beautifully cut pin that fastened her poverty-stricken little dress at the throat.

Then she showed a little animation.

"It's a cameo," she said. "My uncle sent it to me from Greece."

Asmus opened his eyes. "You have an uncle in Greece?" he said.

"Yes," nodding vigorously. "My uncle in Greece is a great man. Next time he comes to see us he will bring me a doll as big as me, and when I am older he will marry me, and then I shall be his Queen."

"His Queen?"

"Yes; my uncle is called the King of the Mainotti. He has ever so many great big marble mountains, and he can do anything he likes there; and the air there is so lovely and warm, and I shall take my mamma with me, and then she will get well."

"Is your mother ill?"

"Yes; she has been ill for three years," she said in a low voice.

"You'll take your father with you too, won't you?"

"No!" The no was uttered with such energy that Asmus opened both his eyes and his mouth. For quite a while he stood in front of her without uttering a sound, and looking very embarrassed, sometimes glancing at her, sometimes looking into the distance. Things were not as they should be with her, he felt. At last he put his hand into his trouser pocket and said:

"I will give you something." And he pressed a large glass marble into her hand, his beloved marble that every one admired so much because there was a winged figure inside it.

"Girls don't play with marbles," she said, with a smile; and because she had such a serious little face her smile looked wonderfully beautiful.

"Never mind about that, just you keep it, please do!" he exclaimed hastily, with a deprecating gesture of the hand. He moved a step or two backwards so that she might not give him his marble back.

"Thank you," she said then, and put the marble into her pocket.

Asmus was just going to ask: "Do you come here always?" when a tall, broad-shouldered, and very well-liking man came out of the tavern with the landlord. He was a town-traveller, and carried in his hand a portmanteau containing samples.

"There she is, sitting there again, the little idiot!" he exclaimed to the landlord. "She always refuses to come in with me; it is not aristocratic enough for her. My daughter's a very grand young lady, but she's slightly cracked all the same!" He tapped his forehead with his fingers and laughed a loud, expansive laugh. Then he handed the portmanteau—which was evidently far too heavy for her to carry—to the child, and set off with the air of a man who has enjoyed his repast. Under the tunnel the little girl put down the portmanteau, looked round at Asmus and nodded to him. Asmus nodded back to her seven times at least. Then the slightly-built, fragile-looking child hurriedly took up her load again and vanished out of sight round the corner.

Where was the nine-year-old Christiane who could say the Sundays between Easter and Whitsuntide off

so pat?—where was Pauline, the ballet-dancer?—where was the child he had worshipped belonging to the family in which Marianne had been in service?—where even was Fräulein Johanna, who used to light his lantern for him in the Kurze Elend, and was wont to kiss him as she did it?—of a sudden they had all vanished, and had gone far, far away into a realm of shadows, and the whole of Asmus Semper was completely taken up with the bright figure of that little brown maid. A soft, gentle light played round his soul, and he felt as proud as if he had come upon a flower that can only be found once in a hundred years by one of the elect. The next day he went to the tavern again; he wanted to—he did not even know her name—he wanted to say to the little brown girl: “When you go to Greece take me with you, please!” but she did not come. For three whole weeks he went to the inn every day that he could succeed in getting off work by any means whatever; but the child never came again. Then he gave it up, though he still felt confident that some day or other in the distant future he would meet her once again.

He now went to school and to his torture with a resignation and cheeriness that was almost sublime. They might jeer at him and tease him as much as they liked—in his soul was a smile that went on for ever; he had a friend of his own somewhere else; he had something they could not touch, something of which they had no idea; he was the intimate friend of a queen with whom some day he would go to Greece.

And soon his sufferings at school were to come to a very drastic termination. He was going through some gymnastic exercises on the slanting ladder with some of his schoolfellows who had remained neutral,

and while he was hanging from one of the rungs after climbing up fairly high Klaus Rampuhn came up, seized hold of his feet and pulled him down, so that his head went bang against the floor, and he lay there unconscious. He soon picked himself up again, his whole face the colour of chalk. Then he was sick. He complained of a singing in his ears, and one of the boys had to escort him home.

Herr Rösing felt a strangely tender, anxious feeling round the region of his heart. He spoke very indignantly about the brutal treatment to which little Semper had been subjected, and told the boys very seriously that he would have no more of it. Klaus Rampuhn looked calmly and coldly into his face, as much as to say: "I don't care a hang for any of that stuff." The other Prætorians were immensely pleased with themselves for their innocence on this particular occasion.

When Asmus arrived at the door of his own house, he dismissed his companions, and told his mother that he had felt ill in school and would like to go to bed. Rebekka was very concerned, and questioned him about the cause; but he assured her, with a shrug of his shoulders, that he had not the remotest idea. He could not bring himself to tell his parents that he had so many enemies in the class. What would they think of him? Besides, he could not explain in the least what this enmity was like, or how it originated, what his feelings were about it, and what the others felt about it—he really did not know himself. And, just like his father, he kept silence; he crushed, pounded, kneaded down the seething mass in his soul until everything was quite smooth again.

Besides, for the next few days he slept almost uninterruptedly, and in five days he had slept himself right again. It was a year before his parents found out how that illness came about, and that he had really got over a slight attack of concussion of the brain. Opinions were divided as to the effects of this concussion. Asmus himself, as well as his family, were of the opinion that there were none; but about this time when Asmus had written his first verses, and had left them lying about carelessly in a drawer, an aunt of his said: "I tell you what, Rebekka, he got that from falling off the ladder."

CHAPTER XXVI

OLD SONGS AWAKEN NEW HAPPINESS; THE SEMPER FAMILY BECOME LUXURIOUS, AND THE NAVIGATOR COMES INTO PORT AGAIN.

ASMUS'S fall from the ladder had struck a blow at the power of the Strelitzers; henceforth he was left in peace. Klaus Rampuhn alone, with his inherent antipathy to Asmus, after the lapse of a fortnight showed an inclination to pick a quarrel with him. When Asmus passed in front of him Klaus stretched out his foot so that Asmus fell over it. But at the very same moment there rang out the sound of a colossal box on the ear. When Asmus looked up, the son of the Everlasting Joiner was standing in front of Klaus Rampuhn, and was saying quietly:

"If you show off any more of your airs, I'll give you a black eye." And then he turned to Asmus and said: "If he doesn't leave you alone, just you tell me."

Klaus Rampuhn was quite taken aback. The joiner's son was not given to quarrelling and fighting, consequently his interference came as a complete surprise. He had hit upon the right way of keeping that Rampuhn fellow in order, and from that moment the joiner's son had a niche in Asmus's heart only just below that in which his parents dwelt.

Before long the Strelitzers actually allowed the

outlaw to take part in their games, and then, to their amazement, they discovered that he was a very merry, bright little fellow, and did not bear any single one of them a grudge. They found out that he was quite a different boy from what they had imagined. They discovered that he only put up his back when he was treated unkindly or unjustly, and henceforth he had a splendid time with them. True, they continued calling him "Trudel," but they said it in such a way now that it was a pleasure to him to hear it. After they had been told in one of their lessons about the first Triumvirate they played at "Triumvirate" during the next recreation interval. "Of the three," their master had said, "Crassus was the richest, Pompey the most highly esteemed, and Cæsar the cleverest. Which of them obtained the mastery in the end?"

"The richest one," some had guessed, but the joiner's son had given the correct answer when he said the "cleverest." The joiner's son they christened Pompey; the son of a rich property-owner Crassus, and "Trudel is Cæsar", the joiner "Pompey" said, and the others agreed, in spite of the strong objection raised by Klaus Rampuhn.

In Asmus's home, too, there was sunshine just then. That diligent young man, Johannes, had advanced from the guitar to the piano. Bit by bit he had succeeded in saving up thirty *marks* (one mark = one shilling), and Ludwig Semper had come across an old acquaintance whom he had not seen for a great number of years, and who told him that he made cigars and traded in pianos, and that if any one was desirous of learning to play the piano he could teach him. If that was not a dispensation of Providence! On account of being a friend of theirs, as he said, the old

acquaintance procured them a piano for thirty marks, and made a nice little profit for himself. It was a table piano of five and a half octaves; its tone reminded them vividly of Fritz "von" Dorn's voice when he spoke through his nose. The old acquaintance also offered to give the purchaser of the piano some music lessons at seven and a half schillings the hour; but having been paid in advance for several lessons, after he had given one he never came again. That was disappointment number one. Johannes, being very eager to learn, expended what little money he had left in investing in an old instruction book. Every moment he could spare from his work, and in the evening when he had finished, and was feeling very tired, he would sit down at the worn-out old instrument, and would practise finger exercises and play scales very briskly and brilliantly. Unfortunately, he very often had to let the instrument, whose spirits were subject to sudden vacillations, have a rest until he could get the tuner to come and screw it up again; and to make matters worse, the tuner explained to Johannes that he had been taken in, and that it was really impossible to keep the old thing in tune. He told him that for sixty marks he could let him have a nearly new piano. But for Johannes sixty marks was a sum altogether out of the question.

And it is only just to mention the fact that, in the course of time, at least 30,000 marks' worth of pleasure welled up out of that worm-eaten, thirty-mark old chest. Every evening they had music in the house now, their own music, and, if you felt so inclined, you could make music for yourself!

And the time came when the young fellow's fingers made the old ramshackle thing sing the song it had learnt in the days of its youth:

“ An Alexis send’ ich dich,
 Er wird, Rose, dich nun pflegen.
 Leuchte freundlich ihm entgegen,
 Dass ihm ist, als säh’ er mich ! ”

it sang it in a low, mournful voice ; in the days of its youth and strength it had probably sung it with sonorous passion.

And one Sunday afternoon it sang :

“ Ob ich dich liebe, frage die Sterne,
 Denen ich oft meine Leiden vertraut
 Ob ich dich liebe, frage die Rose
 Die ich dir sende, von Tränen betaut. ”

And Ludwig and Rebekka Semper came up closer and closer to the instrument, for—wonderful to relate—with that old spinet the whole of their childhood and their youth had come into the house again ! And soon Johannes played a song—Rebekka could not help herself, she was obliged to join in :

“ Verblühn die Rosen deiner Wangen,
 Die Lilien der reinen Brust,
 Denk’ an den Wechsel aller Dinge !
 Erlosch einst meines Daseins Spur,
 Ergrautes Mütterchen, dann singe
 Die Lieder deines Freundes nur. ”

And then Ludwig Semper, with his chivalrous feeling for women, sang :

“ Den Schönen Heil !
 Den Schönen Heil : Beim frohen Becherklange
 Sei ihrem Preis das beste Lied geweiht ! ”

And Rebekka sang :

“ Fahr’ mich hinüber, junger Schiffer,
 Nach dem Rialto fahre mich ! ”

And Ludwig Semper sang :

“ Wenn dieser Siegesmarsch in das Ohr mir schallt
Kaum halt’ ich da die Träne mir zurück mit Gewalt ”

And then no doubt Asmus said : “ Mother, do sing, *Nach Sevilla, nach Sevilla*, again, and Johannes must play it.” And Rebekka sang and Johannes played, and Asmus called to mind how one Sunday his mother ran backwards and forwards between the living-room and the kitchen singing this song ; and Seville still meant for him a public square with houses round it, over which shone the goldenest of golden suns, and which was suffused with the brightest of bright holiday joy and peace.

But eventually the Sempers’ music took a higher flight. They had become acquainted with a family living quite near to them, and one of the daughters—a teacher—used to come to see them every now and again, and then she would play the *Maiden’s Prayer* and *The Convent Bells* ; and they used to return the visit, and the young girl’s mother would play Beethoven and Bach. And when the sad-looking lady, who never went out of the house, sat at the piano her husband used to sit beside her making nets. He was a Herr von Zässingen, and once upon a time he had had a big estate, but he had got through everything. Now he made nets, and people bought them from him, more because they pitied him than because they really wanted them ; his wife earned much more by her embroidery. At home, Herr von Zässingen was only allowed to speak when spoken to. He made up for this when he went to see the Sempers ; then he would chat about Henriette Sontag, and about old times when everything used to be bigger and better, not only estates, but even snow-

flakes as well. "I can as-as-assure you, Herr Semper, I have seen falls of snow! I remember once when I was out coursing with my splendid old Beppo"—here his eyes looked as if they were full of tears—"that it snowed—how am I to describe it?—snowflakes as big as this saucer!" It was a continued source of delight to Ludwig Semper to hear how those snowflakes went on growing. At first they were the size of a florin, then of hens' eggs, now they had become as big as saucers. He hoped by patience to get them as big as cartwheels. When Herr von Züssingen had taken his departure you would see Ludwig Semper shaking so with laughter that his shoulders jumped up and down violently. Asmus, however, while Herr von Züssingen was discoursing, used to sit there in silent content, and, strange to say, it always made him think of the time when they were living in the Düstere lange Balken, and he sat beside the bandy-legged dwarf with the round, bright-red cheeks, and read about the man who had shot a cherry-stone into the head of a stag, and had seen 'him again years after with a splendid cherry-tree between his antlers.

Yes, at this time things were so flourishing with the Semper family that they actually gave entertainments and invited the von Züssingen family to them,—entertainments at which there were sandwiches and punch, and—so that they might be thoroughly reckless while they were about it—oranges for dessert. Consequently, they were able to look forward to Christmas with the greatest cheerfulness. Johannes, with something very mysterious about both eyes and mien, had stored up a sum of money, and had then expended it on a magnificent pedestal lamp, a lamp with a tulip-

shaped, ground-glass globe with flowers on it, and a black marble pedestal. For some time, it had been his duty to dress the Christmas-tree and set light to the candles, and when the door opened, lo and behold! the new lamp was burning by the side of the Christmas-tree! And ever afterwards, when any visitor looked at the lamp, Rebekka would say: "That was given me by my son Johannes. The pedestal is of black marble." That was the lamp which still lit up the little room in which Rebekka lived when she was an old lady of eighty, and about which she used to be so fond of telling her visitors: "My son Johannes, who has been in America for the last twenty-five years, gave me that for a Christmas present thirty-five years ago! The pedestal is black marble."

About this time, too, Henry the Navigator returned from some voyage or other; he entered the Semperian harbour with all his sails unfurled, and when his cargo was discharged it was found that he had a brand-new book on board for Asmus. He had also a passenger on board, and once again that passenger was Leonhard.

CHAPTER XXVII

FRIENDS COME AND GO, MORE ABOUT THE CLOUD-SHIFTER AND CIGAR-MAKER, AND THE POET AND SAILOR.

It was only at very long intervals that his family had heard any news of Leonhard. One of Ludwig's assistants had worked with him for a week, and told them how—when he was in a good mood—the boy had kept the whole “shop” in fits of laughter, and that his employer was so afraid he might lose him that he handled him like a raw egg. Some one else had seen him in Hamburg, sauntering along the quays of the harbour, and looking at the ships—in the middle of the day, and in the middle of the week; and yet another one had caught a glimpse of him at the theatre among the gods, when Albert Niemann was singing *Tannhäuser*, and had noticed the strained look on his face and the intent expression in his dark eyes as he looked and listened; and yet another one had come across him in very rowdy company in a little public-house frequented by cab-drivers. Since that evening when he had appeared upon the scene as a “dandy” he had never set foot in his home again. And now the Cloud-Shifter was bringing him with him; he had obtained leave to do so from his parents the previous day.

Rebekka had exclaimed in a loud voice, in which there was a note of jubilation: "Yes, yes, of course!"

Ludwig had opened his eyes very wide, and had raised no objection. But his face showed that he now looked forward with much greater cheerfulness to the great festival. The next day he did not allude in any way to his eldest son, but there was an alert cheeriness about everything he did or said.

When both the Christmas-tree and that marvellous lamp were alight there was a ring at the front door, and all of them felt: "There he is." Johannes went out hurriedly, and when he came back he brought Leonhard with him.

"Good evening," said Leonhard. Alas! where was the white piqué waistcoat, where the dainty boots with the patent leather toe-caps? Bitterly cold though it was he had not even an overcoat on, and on the short jacket which was buttoned up so carefully a couple of buttons were missing.

"Good evening," said Ludwig Semper.

The children were too excited to say anything, and Rebekka was kneeling down in front of the chest of drawers to get out a table-cloth. Leonhard went up to her, bent over her, put his arm round her and said: "Good evening, mother," and Rebekka put her arm round him, and drawing him down to her, kissed him and said: "Good evening my child!" and their tears mingled in the Sempers' poor little stock of linen.

Then the children plucked up courage and kissed their eldest brother, and Ludwig Semper gave him his hand. Then came an interval of silence that could be felt. And Asmus thought: "He thinks, for sure, that because he is not well dressed we do not like him—therefore we will be specially nice to him," and he ran up to him and pressed up quite close to him

and showed him the book Moldenhuber had given him. It was called *Sigismund Rüstig, der Bremer Steuermann*, and was a translation from the English of Captain Marryat. While he was showing his brother the pictures in the book, through the merry din the others were making, Asmus heard Rebekka say: "He's a dear boy, all the same!" and he heard Ludwig's answer as well: "Yes, yes—h'm!"

This year the Christmas joys lasted much longer than Christmas itself, for Leonhard joined his father at his work, and, what's more, so did the Cloud-Shifters! Every working day was now a brilliant festival. Heinrich Moldenhuber had at last got the better of those shimmering, surging dreams of a real life on the ocean waves, and had ended by becoming a cigar-maker, for the very same reason that induced Ludwig Semper not to change his craft: namely, because while you were at work you could give as much time to thought as you liked; and now the dingy workroom echoed with the strains of *Norma* and *Euryanthe*, of *Walther von der Vogelweide* and of *Penthesilea*, with the names of Thorwaldsen and Albrecht Dürer, of Danton and Robespierre, of Tiberius Gracchus and Ferdinand Lassalle. In the interim they had both of them, Heinrich Moldenhuber and Leonhard Semper, become disciples of Lassalle, but in different places and by different paths. Moldenhuber's convictions had been refined and purified by thought and knowledge, and by the rarefied air through which he passed when journeying through the clouds; Leonhard's opinions were nothing but emotion and empty talk. It may have been about four weeks after Christmas that he propounded the marvellous thesis that all manufacturers are rogues. As usual, Ludwig Semper showed his divergence from his son's views by smiling

and shaking his head. He defended his employer, who certainly had his bad points but also his good ones. But in Leonhard the craving for a lawless life was beginning to simmer again. True, no one in his own home kept him in check either by word or deed—even Rebekka was very careful not to nag at him; but his parents' control gave him a sense of oppression, just because it was no actual control but only the silent effect of their presence. He answered his father passionately, and at last forgot himself so far as to cry out: "That's rot!"

Asmus was horribly frightened. It would never have dawned upon him as possible that any one could so far forget himself as to be disrespectful to his father, but that his own brother should be the one to be so, filled him with horror. Of a sudden, the whole world seemed to be full of sadness; to him his father was still the Lord God. And then his heart boiled over with rage. . . .

Ludwig Semper did not say a word, but that only made Frau Rebekka say the more. She spoke her mind very strongly to her eldest son, and was not too particular about the expressions she used. But the young fellow seemed to regard this rupture as a welcome release; he broke off his cigar-board, took his hat and coat, and left his parents' house for the last time. Now followed a couple of dark, stormy days, during which the brightest sun could not pierce the clouds in the tobacco-room; but how would the Cloud-Shifter have acquired his name if he had not understood the art of shifting out of the way the grey clouds, and of shifting forward those with red and golden edges? He was neither a wag nor a wit; but on his brow dwelt the invincible cheerfulness of the thinker. On his way home from his father's

funeral he had had an argument anent Spinoza with the pastor, and his eyes had laughed as he talked. The philosophic cheerfulness which bears with equanimity all transitory things, and perceives in all that is and has been simply the inevitable realisation of the World Idea—this cheerfulness it had not been needful for him to acquire, it had been born in him. No one had ever seen him angry or fretful, or filled with hatred. If he had been brought into contact with evil-doers, he would talk about them afterwards with a cheery irony, or he would be silent, and, deep in thought, would protrude his underlip to such an extent that Asmus thought: "You could set up some tin soldiers on that." If some friend of his met with a misfortune, he would not fail to pay him a visit; but he would only refer to the misfortune once, sometimes even not at all, and when the afflicted friend fancied his mind was still full of his misfortune the Cloud-Shifter would have begun to talk about *King Œdipus* and about *The Broken Pitcher*, and—oddly enough—the sufferer enjoyed listening to him and did not feel that his trouble was being treated with heartless profanity. No, the Sempers were soon inhaling that light, bright air, which was really the atmosphere they were accustomed to, and for this the Cloud-Shifter was to a great extent responsible.

He understood cloud-shifting much better than he did cigar-making. His cigars all inherited from their creator his elegiacal way of holding his head on one side, and at times he kneaded such difficult problems into them that all the air was pressed out of them and they refused to light; or, in the noble frenzy of some exalted mood, he would cut off their legs; or if he happened to be talking to Horatio on the terrace at Helsingfors, he would entirely forget to cut the

cigars at all, so that the ends would look like split sausages that have risen in revolt and endeavoured to regain their freedom. Under these circumstances, Ludwig Semper felt that it was a most fortunate thing that Moldenhuber's powers with regard to the output of cigars were not very remarkable; for if the manufacturer discovered "caterpillars" of this description he might possibly make himself rather unpleasant, and might even refuse to give Ludwig Semper any more work. In spite of this, he had not the heart to utter one word of blame to the caterpillar-maker, whom he loved as his own son. It would not have been of any use either. A creature that has been endowed with the power of flight cannot be chained to a kennel, or, as Rebekka was accustomed to express the same idea, "you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

But a brilliant idea soon occurred to Ludwig Semper, an idea that solved all difficulties in the simplest and pleasantest way imaginable. Every morning, or afternoon, it was Moldenhuber's custom to bring a load of books with him of every size and description, and to declare that this one must be read, that that one was magnificent; and then he would begin to read aloud until the tobacco in front of him had got quite dry. Then, at the end of the week, he would set sail for home like a three-master, in a cheerful and exalted frame of mind, and with a cargo of ready money to the value of seven or eight marks. Ludwig Semper now decided to organise things in a different way. He gave Henry the Navigator the appointment of reader-in-ordinary, and he himself, as well as the three journeymen, said they would be delighted to make the cigars the Navigator would have made, and put them down to his credit. To

accomplish this they were, of course, obliged to work every evening and the whole of Saturday; but then, it is when the lamp is alight and the world has grown still that it is so delightful to be read aloud to. The sailer earned more than he had ever done before, and the Semperian Academy had a permanent reader—a luxury they could well afford. But as the Cloud-Shifter could not go on reading for ever, Asmus, who because he was listening so intently stripped fewer leaves than a tobacco-stripper had ever stripped before, was requisitioned one day to act as stop-gap, and he showed such delight at this change of occupation that he seemed absolutely transformed. They all thought him a very pleasant reader, and as he had managed to acquire incidentally a slight knowledge of French and English, he was able to pronounce foreign words like “bourgeoisie” and “Trades Unions,” which so pleased a poor sickly journeyman that he said: “If you want a new book, all you’ve to do is to tell me and I’ll buy it for yer whatever price it is.”

And thus, edifying books and books of good repute were read: sometimes bits of Virgil’s *Æneid*, at other times poems by Herwegh and Freiligrath, sometimes passages from Rousseau’s *Emile*, and afterwards Gerstäcker’s *Trappers of the Arkansas*; at another time Humboldt’s *Kosmos*, and then Schlosser’s *Universal History*, Lassalle’s *Working Man’s Programme*, Thiers’ *History of the French Revolution*, Hufland’s *Makrobiotik*; or, *Art of Prolonging Life*, Voss’s *Louisa*, and Gellert’s *Fables*; and then they would return to Häcklander and Ferdinand Lassalle—and once the Cloud-Shifter actually brought a translation of Plato’s *Phædo* with him; but to that his fellow-journeymen objected very decidedly, as they also did to Fichte’s Speeches. And when

they had had enough reading they would discuss what had been read; and anything they had not understood was explained to them by Ludwig Semper or Heinrich Moldenhuber, and Asmus was allowed to express his opinion—when he had one.

About this time, two ideals were having a struggle for the mastery in Asmus. What was he to be? While reading all these beautiful books the conviction had forced itself upon him that the poet's calling must be a lovely one. Perhaps he would be a poet. Perhaps not, though. For there was another calling which was perhaps more glorious still. That was to be a sailor. When he thought of himself as a sailor he would see himself lying alone on the deck at night looking at the Southern Cross blazing in the dark-blue sky. The Southern Cross had had a fascination for him ever since he had read *Salas y Gomez*—

“Down from Thy heaven upon my bones will shine
The starred presentment of Thy cross divine,”

he would often say to himself. Or he would see himself sitting in bright, silvery air on the mast of a frigate. It must be awfully nice up there, he knew, for he had lain by the Elbe so often by this time, and had followed with his eyes the three-masters as they sailed away into the golden distance; and of this he was quite sure—the tops of those masts lived in another world, in one much more beautiful than this. As he sat on the mast, he would see his ship sail into the sunshiny harbour of Vera Cruz. Vera Cruz most certainly and no other. Even if he had been told, as is a fact, that Vera Cruz was situated between dreary sand-hills and in an arid plain, and that there was very little that was beauti-

ful about it, he would have sailed to Vera Cruz all the same. That had been determined by Destiny. He had once read a story in which the youthful hero, a midshipman, went to Vera Cruz, and the word Vera Cruz had instantaneously called up before his mind's eye a vision of all the colouring and glories of the Tropics, of a blissfully dreamy town of golden towers peacefully reposing on the harbour of everlasting sunshine. Therefore, he could not help it, he had to go to Vera Cruz.

Sigismund Rüstig had awakened again in the boy's soul all the longing for the unattainable and the craving for a life of adventure.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ASMUS MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE SON OF MAN.

BUT worse was to come; the dilemma was to be turned into a trilemma. One Sunday morning his brother Johannes took him to Hamburg to the Museum. There he saw the Discobolus and the Borghese Gladiator, the Dying Gaul and the Farnese Bull, the Venus of Melos, of the Medici, and of Cnidus, Hermes with the boy Dionysus, and the Apollo Belvedere, Octavius Augustus, and Paeonius's Nikê. Johannes made a point of glancing first at the statue and then at his brother; he expected outbursts of enthusiasm and delight. But in one particular Asmus resembled the statues; he could not utter a word, and from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet he was living a grand, solemn life. He had once been to church with his mother, and it had been very solemn there; but it was much more so here. From this place he took a glittering, sparkling thing away with him, the invisible celestial garment in which from this time forth he clothed everything of which he heard that it came from Greece, took also that bitter-sweet longing of the German who looks back to Hellas as to a lost paradise of form.

Nay, to be able to make statues like those was a very different thing from being a sailor — very,

very much more to be desired. He threw the sailor idea overboard, and the next day announced to his assembled family: "I wish to be a sculptor or a poet." This was greeted with Homeric laughter. "Yes," exclaimed Ludwig Semper, with a mournful smile, "it would be very nice if all one had to do was 'to wish.'" It was not considered at all necessary to discuss the pecuniary side of the question, or to smile satirically at Asmus's naïveté, though it was difficult to imagine how any one could be so foolish as to think it possible that in a house in which there was going to be an odour of gruel again in a few days the necessary funds would be forthcoming for an expensive course of study! True, the baby only lived a day or so; nevertheless, out of a hundred possibilities ninety-nine were in favour of Asmus Semper's being obliged to content himself with the noble art of "pipe turning," which it cost so little to learn. They dared not even venture to take upon themselves the burden of a three or four years' apprenticeship to a handicraft.

But little Asmus's naïveté was much greater than they had any idea of. The question of cost had never entered his head. What more could possibly be required than a tool to chip and chisel with, and the firm intention of being a sculptor? By some means he procured a hammer and a chisel, and soon everything of the nature of stone or wall anywhere in his immediate neighbourhood was covered with samples of his art. But it soon occurred to him that if you wanted to carve a statue you ought to be able to draw it first! Where could he learn to draw? At his school drawing was not one of the subjects taught.

What was taught, I wonder, in Herr Rösing's

class? Asmus was now having a peaceful, but not a joyful time at school; he did what he was obliged to do, or left it undone, just as he pleased. He did not much mind going to school, neither did he much mind when school was over, and while the lessons were going on he lived his own life. He was not conscious of the fact that his time was being stolen, that time which should have been devoted to the sowing of seed and to the planting out of the seedlings; for children believe that there is plenty of time in the world, just as there is plenty of the water, which they waste, too, because they also fancy it costs nothing. They play with time as tiny children do with money; to them, both half-crowns and time are pretty, glittering, revolving wheels, but of no value whatsoever.

The best thing about Herr Rosing's class was the stories. When his pupils had been less troublesome than usual for some time, and had not worried him much, he would tell them a story as a reward. His best story was the one about the traveller who, when he was journeying through a forest, went into an inn belonging to some robbers. With this story he could even hold the Prætorians in hand for a time. An old woman, who looked like a witch, gave the traveller a very warm welcome and lighted him to his bedroom. When he was inside, and the old woman had closed the door, he heard a bolt being pushed forward very, very slowly. "Hullo!" he thought. He examined the room very carefully, and under the bed he found a dead body, with severed head, which the robbers and murderers had hidden there. He thought that rather unpleasant. He examined the room still more carefully, and noticed something on the ceiling which was evidently a trap-door. "Aha!" he thought. "Through that trap-door they send down an axe which

cuts off the head of any guest who may be sleeping in that bed. That's what must have happened to the one under the bed." Even this humane way of being killed did not appeal to the traveller, and had not the effect of making him feel inclined to rest his weary limbs.

"What does our friend do then?" went on Herr Rösing. "What but put the dead body with the severed head into the bed, draw the counterpane over it, put out the light and await events. For hours he sits there waiting. At last—about midnight—he hears a slight noise overhead. He hears people whispering; and now—the flaps open very, very quietly, and he can see a wee strip of light—There, boys, some more next time," concluded Herr Rösing.

"Oh, please, Herr Rösing! please, please, Herr Rösing!" shouted all the boys in chorus in imploring accents, thirsting for more; but Herr Rösing was as inexorable as the editor of a novel magazine and as the scissors of Atropos; not another syllable was to be got out of him. And as this "Children's" story had a number of parts of a similar nature, and never came out oftener than once a fortnight, Herr Rösing was able to maintain, for months, some sort of law and order amongst his pupils. Asmus realised to the full that it was a very wretched sort of story, the sort of story that a Schinderhannes, or a Rosza Sandor would write, and which came out in penny numbers, and were sometimes thrown at their front door at home, and about which his father usually made some jocular remarks. Still, they were ripping stories all the same, jolly good fun, though they did not serve to raise Herr Rösing in his estimation.

And yet towards Easter Asmus was to hear a story

from the lips of this master which would affect the boy's soul most powerfully, playing upon it and causing it to quiver like a harp, through which the storm-wind rushes during a night that seems as if it would never end,—from the *lips* of the master, remember, for it was not he that breathed life into the story; that came from a long way off, from a serene and holy place, and the old man, as well as the boy at his feet, was subdued by the sublime breath that played upon his soul too, as if it were an instrument of music. The aged master did not tell the story to the boys, he read it from a Bible history, read it for hours, half to himself as it were, never altering the tone of his voice, which he seemed afraid to raise, and which sounded as sad as running water at the bottom of a deep ravine. This is what he read:

“And when the hour was come He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. And He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.”

Asmus now heard for the first time from the beginning to end the tragedy of the Son of Man. Just as for him the meadow between the two railway embankments had once been Bethlehem, just as he had seen the star there and the wise men from the East, so Jerusalem was now all round the school-house with its tall Gothic windows, and the school-house itself became for him the palace of Pontius Pilate. Yet, strange to say, a long hall in the school-house was the room in which the Lord washed the feet of the twelve, and partook of the bread and wine with them. And the miserable little garden at the side became Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. There it was that Jesus said to Peter: “Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice!” and

Peter swore that he would rather die than deny his Master. There it was that the strong, young soul of the Lord writhed under the burden of the suffering awaiting Him, so that His sweat fell like drops of blood down to the ground; there that when He went back to His companions He found them asleep! Tears came into little Semper's eyes when Jesus said: "What! could ye not watch with Me one hour?" He had faithful disciples and friends; and yet when He was weighed down by sorrow He was alone, completely alone. And then, again, in one of the schoolrooms the meeting of the Great Council took place, and they beat Jesus with their fists, mocked Him and spat in His face. Oh! Asmus Semper understood that, the hatred and the brutality, and the savage stupidity—he understood it all too well, though unconscious why it was he understood it. His childlike heart was far from committing the sacrilege of comparing the sufferings of Jesus with his own; but he understood the hatred, saw it, saw its eyes, its teeth. And he understood why, at last, Jesus answered nothing when they questioned Him. He felt in his own throat the choking sensation that pain and shame would cause the Sufferer to feel. Asmus Semper knew that whatever the Saviour might say it would be turned against Him. He understood intuitively that all the words spoken by innocence are but straw flung on the fire of hatred; that they only serve as fuel, and that the raging flames strew the ashes mockingly around.

In the porch of the schoolhouse Peter was standing near the soldiers' fire, and a man exclaimed: "Thou art one of them, for thy speech bewrayeth thee," and Peter cursed, and swore that he knew not the man. Then the cock crowed for

the third time, and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. He was the most zealous of His disciples! And that look of Jesus forsaken, penetrated from Judea right through the centuries into the eyes of the Oldensund child. Jesus of Nazareth was still standing there and looking at Asmus Semper, and His great eyes were asking: "Would you too have forsaken Me?" And the heart of the child felt sick and full of fear—and he could not answer: "No."

Outside, in the forecourt, the tumultuous crowd was heaving and swaying, and the furious people were shouting: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" And out of the great central doorway stepped Pontius Pilate, and said: "I find no fault in Him." The boy's throbbing heart shouted out grateful thanks to him, and the same heart sprang joyfully to meet the noble woman who sent the message to her husband: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man: I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him."

But the governor's good intentions were like a tiny skiff upon a raging sea; they were seized upon by the tumultuous waves and shattered to pieces.

In the square in front of the school, on the north side, was Golgotha, the place of skulls. There three crosses rose into the bright, shimmering light. And in the midst of his torments the Holy One spoke loving words: "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do!" Asmus could not understand how He could forgive His enemies. But he understood, when the dying man gave into one another's keeping the two human beings whom He loved best in the world, and said to them: "Woman, behold thy son—Son, behold thy mother." And when the innocent Sufferer found another companion on the last desolate

bit of His journey, when one of the malefactors declared himself on the side of Him who had been scorned and rejected, how well he understood the intense gladness with which Jesus exclaimed: "Verily, I say unto thee, to-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise!" But when Jesus cried: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!" the cry wrung the boy's heart. He felt that for the Crucified One that hour was the most terrible of all, for during that hour He no longer believed in Himself, He no longer believed that God was with Him; His agony was inexpressible, for He was quite alone. But when the Saviour said: "I am athirst," the child's sudden horror melted into gentle sorrow. That He, the Great, the Holy, the Divine One should say like a child: "I am athirst," stirred the boy's heart to its innermost depths, and brought tears into his dilated eyes. The darkness that fell upon the land at the sixth hour grew less dense when Christ said: "It is finished." The light returned. But once more Jesus cried out, and again the boy's heart was wrung. Then the gentle, silent Sufferer said: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," and He gave up the ghost. And then it seemed to Asmus as if silence had settled down over the whole world, and that the whole world had only one heart, and that that heart was beating with slow, dull, heavy throbs.

"And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom;" and in Asmus's heart the veil that had hidden a new world from his sight was torn asunder. For the first time he beheld Christianity in its pure and simple grandeur as Jesus the Nazarene, the eternal King of the heart, had founded it—a living, all-convincing Christianity.

"In the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and there they laid Jesus." •

How beautiful is the faithfulness of the few who still cling to us in times of sorrow! Like a beautiful sunset after a dark rainy day!

And the Bible tells us "That they rested the sabbath day, according to the commandment." Asmus had never experienced such a peaceful Sabbath as this one. An everlasting, silent peace rests upon this day, a peace that has never descended again in all the centuries. It is not the heavy silence of pain and dread, it is a luminous peace, light as down, a peaceful silence full of expectation, during which the lifeless things around us glisten and have a soft, smiling look, a companionable, sociable silence, during which, though all lips are silent, all hearts are speaking and all thoughts sending greetings one to the other.

And the Resurrection morn has come. Weeping Mary stands in front of the empty grave and supposes the man behind her is the gardener. "But He saith unto her: Mary!" •Then she recognises Him. None but He could speak to her so lovingly. And over the whole story there is light, light floating over everything, but remaining stationary over none. A joyous light that jumps and flits about, sometimes over the disciples, sometimes over the women, sometimes in the grave, sometimes over the priests, sometimes in Jerusalem, sometimes in Galilee. But it is brightest over the road to Emmaus. There two of the disciples are walking along with transfigured faces, and between them walks the Risen One. A luminous cloud surrounds Him, and His presence causes their hearts to burn within them, but they do not know whence the brightness comes. With

them walk the glorious beauty of the dawn, divine enthusiasm, holy rapture; but whence streams this secret, mysterious joy they know not. Not until they have reached the inn, and He breaks bread with them, are their eyes opened.

Oh, blessed are they who have walked to Emmaus in the early morning hours, the peace of a beautiful world in their eyes—the joy of the spirit of holiness in their hearts!

Never in the whole course of his life did Asmus forget the sunshine upon the road to Emmaus.

And ever after, whenever mention was made of everlasting bliss in the world to come, he would think of the atmosphere of happiness surrounding the story of the Resurrection, and of the light on the stone before the sepulchre when Jesus said: "Mary!" and Mary recognised him and cried out: "Rabboni!" This bliss had nothing material about it, it was a life of silence only and of everlasting contemplation.

Even his master appeared to him in another light after he had heard this story. The majesty and force of the word-pictures had ennobled him as it were; Asmus was able to regard him again with feelings of reverence and affection. When he had been two years in the class, however, Herr Rösing fell ill, and his place was taken by a young man; by a young man with the most honest and steadfast-looking eyes imaginable, with a drooping reddish moustache and a voice that was far from strong. He looked as if his forebears had been in the Prussian Civil Service for years. He began by reading aloud to the children *The Postilion*, by Lenau, much to their amazement, as it was not a hymn. He read it with considerable expression and pathos. After he had talked to them about the poem, and addressed several questions to

Asmus, Asmus had to read it aloud. Herr Bendemann—that was the young master's name—looked at him for quite ten seconds, and then said: "That was good." When the lesson was over he called Asmus to him, and the following cross-examination took place:

"What is your name?"

"Asmus Semper."

"How old are you?"

"Ten and three-quarters."

"What is your father?"

"A cigar-maker."

"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"Yes, seven."

"What do you want to do?"

"I don't know yet."

"Well, there is plenty of time for that. You can sit down."

Asmus went back to his place, and Herr Bendemann left the schoolroom.

"What did he want? What did he ask? What are you to do?" all the boys asked at once.

"I do not know," said Asmus, looking rather stupid.

He did not know that the man who had just gone out at the door was his Destiny.

BOOK III

CHAPTER XXIX

TREATS OF THE APPARATUS IN ASMUS'S EYES, OF HIS
AGRICULTURAL STUDIES WITH DIERICH MATTENS,
AND OF HIS VIEWS IN REGARD TO MATRIMONY.

FRAU REBEKKA could no longer endure her flat in the Brunnenstrasse. When she had lived in a place for two or three years she never could endure it any longer. Doubtless for that too her blood was in some way or other responsible.

"I really cannot stay in this hole any longer," would then be her cry.

"It was at your own wish that we came here," her husband would remark.

"Well, I never! It was at *my* wish that we took this flat?" she would exclaim indignantly. "Well, I must say!"

"What? You did *not* wish us to take it?" Ludwig would rejoin with an ironical smile. "Well, that's an amusing idea, I must say."

This dialogue took place before every change of abode, and each time, Frau Rebekka Semper was convinced of the fact that she had never been the one to wish for a move before. And yet Ludwig Semper's temperament and philosophy saved him from the least suspicion of any desire to lead the life of a nomad.

A popular saying asserts that three removals are as bad as a fire. If this is true, the Sempers must have been burnt out of house and home four times since their marriage—a luxury they could not very well afford. True, Rebekka represented the calculating and cohesive element in the family, and economy was her strong point, but her blood always got the better of her economy.

Where was the new habitation that Rebekka had such an intense longing for? It was situated where that garden used to be that had run to waste, the garden that had such a quantity of neglected fruit-trees in it, through the branches of which the tall, round, arched windows of the “dead” church used to peer; it stood on the spot where Asmus had once acted the part of a brigand, where, as he crouched down amid the branches, he used to stare into the eyes of the “dead” church, and look down with sovereign contempt on the venal myrmidons of the law. But, alas! the trees had ceased to rustle; they had all been cut down, and their place had been taken by a thing that could not rustle, that could not make a noise at all, in fact; a thing that stared out stupidly and silently into the world, like a mass of stone with holes in it, and that thing was a long, many-storeyed tenement house. And, alas! again, the “dead” church had come to life; the place of the dead thing, with its mysterious whisperings of legendary lore, had been taken by a mindless living thing; a joiner’s workshop had been set up there, a pot-house, and various squalid little shops. Nay, forsooth! Rebekka’s quicksilver had not taken the right direction this time.

Opposite the Sempers’ abode was a sweet little prison, with four walls, a roof, and three little barred windows,

and adjoining this prison was a long row of almshouses; then in the same street was a tobacco-factory, a brewery, and an iron-foundry; and all of these smoked with all their might. Rebekka Semper was to repent bitterly of ever having gone to live opposite a prison. Day after day, her ire was to be excited by the sight of an enormously stout policeman dragging along one beggar and vagabond after the other with handcuffs on their wrists; and every day she could not forbear taking sides with the poor devil of a prisoner against the hyper-triumphant representative of the majesty of the law. She never failed to get furious about every fresh and conspicuous miscarriage of justice, and the views of her son Asmus were in complete accord with hers. Since those days times have changed, man takes his fellow-man in a kinder and more considerate manner into that little dice-shaped building, for the prison has been turned into a Government Office, and from the windows the bars have been removed.

This particular spot was known by the name of "Am Born" (By the Well-head), which simply proves how very misleading names are. The pleasant sound of this name conjures up before the mind's eye of the hearer a dream-like village idyll by the side of a laughing bit of water; there had been a pond there once certainly, but it had vanished long ago. Whether that was a loss or a gain to the neighbourhood we need not trouble to inquire; at all events the charming little picture, which the name naturally led you to expect, turned out to be a perfect swindle, and of the poetry which it promised in such a hypocritical fashion the reality contained little or nothing.

That is to say, unless you had at your disposal the

tiny little apparatus which for eleven years Asmus Semper had carried about in his eye. Seen through this little apparatus, it is true, even the welter of bars, hammers, bolts, pincers, nails, rail, barrows and moulds, strewn about the yard of the iron-foundry, gradually came to life and talked; and when the big doors of the iron-works stood open, the vast interior which his eye could not penetrate would look like an immense cavern, in which unrecognisable human forms and colossal shadows swung about red-hot buckets; in which molten metal heated to a white heat discharged itself into hissing, smoking, greedily-open jaws, on the walls and ceiling shadowy arms as long as trees stretched out, strained themselves and snatched at things; in which, out of the blackest depths of the darkness, bodies without heads, heads with white, gleaming eyes, shot up in a vivid glare of light and then disappeared again. Oh yes, when you had known them for some time, these factories, with their winches, their hatches, their windows, and their chimneys, became talkative and confiding. Such a factory window, black, grimy, with half its panes broken, could look at you as if it were a human eye,—like a maliciously-threatening or a sad, serious human eye. And then, when the evening sun was sparkling on it, it would look like a gloomy eye gazing at hope in the far-away distance.

Then—to be just before all—there were really two spots in this part of the world in which it did not take you so long to find the poetry. These were—at one end of the street the smithy, in which the red flames were always leaping up and the white sparks flying up to the merry cling-clang and sing-song of the hammer, where each and every day, horses, all of whom had different characters, were shod just outside the door, and

where Asmus passed many a happy hour while he was getting over the effects of tobacco-stripping; and at the other end the little farm belonging to Dierich Mattens. The real name of Dierich Mattens, who was nearly seven feet in height, was Dietrich Martens, but he would have considered it a most foolish bit of affectation, and a most ridiculous waste of energy, to pronounce so many superfluous consonants. He called himself Dierich Mattens, therefore, and this fashion of pronouncing his words was so inseparable from his personality that other people always called him Dierich Mattens too; confidential friends like Asmus Semper would address him simply as Dierich, which was quite in consonance with his own ideas. Dierich allowed all things to "gang their gait," his horses as well as his own life; he never so much as dreamt of making the least endeavour to induce either his horses or his life to go along at a faster pace by what, in his opinion, would have been the greatest waste of energy. He possessed nothing but a small quantity of arable land, one cow, two horses, several pigs and some cocks and hens, and like the true peasant-Diogenes that he was, he knew how to measure out his work so as to enable him to earn just sufficient pudding, bacon, and tobacco for himself, his old mother, and, quite recently, for his best friend, Asmus Semper. Ambition, covetousness, and soap were all equally foreign to his nature. The agricultural studies which Asmus had commenced in the year of the great war with the grey carthorse Joch and the brindled cow, Grete, he now continued with the two Danish mares Stine and Süten; and at this period of his life it would have been difficult for him to have told any one whether he preferred reading *Don Carlos*, or stroking affectionately the flanks of Süten and

Stine. It was jollier perhaps, though, to eat dumplings and bacon with Mother Martens, or to sit on the palings in the cabbage garden with Dierich smoking a clay-pipe. But Dierich himself was not content with smoking; he usually chewed Cavendish at the same time. Now Cavendish is tobacco which for chewing purposes is prepared with a sweet sauce and then pressed into cakes, and which, like vice, has at first a very sweet savour, but later on it burns and scorches like its namesake the American pirate. When Dierich had bitten off a fresh piece he never failed to offer the cake to his friend, and then Asmus, with the air of a connoisseur, would also bite off a piece. True, as soon as Dierich's back was turned he used to spit out the disgusting stuff, but he would have considered it unmanly to refuse it.

When the seven-foot-long Dierich and the diminutive Asmus were seated beside one another on the palings and smoking, either absolute silence reigned between them, while both their faces wore the most philosophic of expressions, or they conversed with great earnestness and in a dignified manner, as is the way of men.

"She's given me another sermon," Dierich would say, for instance.

"Who? Thy mother?"

"Yes."

"What about?"

"Well, thou canst guess that."

"About getting married?"

"Yes."

(A fairly long interval of silence.)

"Who does she want thee ter marry now?"

"Markmann's girl."

"The one with the screw loose?"

"Yes."

"I wouldna' take that 'un."

"Not a bit on it."

(Renewed silence.)

"She's plenty o' money," Dierich began again.

"Wot's the good o' that!" exclaimed Asmus.

"Riches can't buy love anyways."

"Right yer are."

"Then, when yer married she'll taunt yer 'cos yer got nothin'."

"Yes, that's jest wot'll happen. I'll not get married at all," said Dierich. "Do yer think yer will?"

"I ain't quite sartin'. When I'm big I'll marry some 'un, I think."

"Not me, though, I'm too old; for a young 'un I'm too old, and I don't care for an old 'un."

"That's natral," said Asmus.

(Long interval of silence.)

"I can't think why the old 'ooman ain't content! We're jolly comfy as we ere, ain't we?"

"Rayther."

"And who can tell how it might turn out; might get a cat inter the house."

"Right again," said Asmus. "Yer can't tell wot yer might get. Marriage is a lottery."

Some days after this conversation had taken place, when they were still at some little distance from one another, Dierich greeted with a laugh his bosom friend, who was jumping over various puddles on his way to the farmyard.

"I say, the old 'un's in such a tantrum!" cried out Dierich.

"Is she?"

"Yes; she started that talk about marryin' agen."

"Aha!"

"Guess wot I said to her?"

"Well?"

"Jist yer get married yersel' (she's turned seventy-seven, yer know). Man, yer should jist o' seen how mad she was. She ran arter me with ter broom."

"Did she hit you?" asked Asmus.

"Yes, but it didna' hurt!" said Dierich, with a laugh, showing all his splendid teeth.

"But she's fond o' yer all the same," Asmus assured him genially.

"I know that, man; and if I got a long-haired critter inter the house and she weren't nice ter her, eh?"

Asmus made a face and shrugged his shoulders.

It was evident that it never occurred to Asmus that his mother also was a long-haired creature. His respect and reverence for her was much too great to think of her in any other way than as just his mother.

But it was not only on questions connected with love and marriage that Dierich asked his friend's advice; in the various affairs connected with the house, the land, and the garden he very rarely did anything without having previously obtained Asmus's consent, which, however, he was sure would never be withheld. Asmus spent hours and hours at this squalid but peaceful little farm, and before long it became an asylum for him, an *ultimum refugium* from the horrors of tobacco-stripping and his mother's fire-irons. When some one from home came to look for him, Dierich would lie with such good grace that you might have fancied that lying was actually a desirable

virtue and truthfulness a hateful vice, and when the messenger had taken his departure Dierich would whistle and' call out: "The coast's clear!" and Asmus Semper's head would pop up from behind a gooseberry bush.

CHAPTER XXX

FROM SHAKESPEARE TO A TOY PISTOL, FROM THAT TO
ERLANGER BEER AND OTHER DELIGHTS, AND TO
THE INEVITABLE CATASTROPHE.

ASMUS was really enjoying life thoroughly just then. All his spare time he spent either with Dierich Mattens or in cultivating the acquaintance of another man, and that man was William Shakespeare. He read Shakespeare from beginning to end, read it as a glorious story-book full of wonderful adventures and brilliant, many-coloured pictures. His soul wandered to and fro between Dierich's barn and Macbeth's castle, between his friend's rye-fields and poor Tom's heath, between Mother Martens' windows with their bright geraniums and Juliet's balcony. He read everything with a devotional, receptive eye and heart: the sensuous vows of the lovers as well as Hamlet's flights of thought, Falstaff's jokes and the horrors of assassination in Macbeth; all this was sacred fire and worship; for on the altar of his heart everything was consumed, and the pure flames of a higher life rose up towards the heavens.

Oh! ye short-sighted fools who are afraid of art for virtue's sake! If you could have seen into the heart of this boy as he read, you would have understood that art is as innocent as a child.

By a strange chance it happened that about this time he came across a volume of a low-class journal in which the trial of some murderers was worked up into a "novel." This wonderful work was profusely illustrated, and amongst the pictures was one in which the victim, gagged and bound, was lying at full length upon a table in a pitch-dark room, and a villainous-looking old woman was holding a candle to his face, while several brutal-looking men were making ready to kill their victim. This horrible picture tormented him for many months. As soon as he was anywhere in the dark there was the picture with that revolting old woman, and the bright, glaring light on the poor man's white face. Even after the lapse of years he would still see it at times. He had a distinct sense of two contending forces within himself: one wishing not to see the picture, the other, and that the stronger one, wishing to see it, in spite of the feeling of horror and disgust it excited; and this other force was *his* will, too. He would say to himself: "I will think of something else, of the next year's fair or of some other beautiful thing," and he would succeed in doing so; but in the midst of the tumult and the ringing of bells at the cake-stalls and the merry-go-rounds that other will would suddenly cry out: "I want to see it, I do, indeed I do," and there would be that vile picture again. An odd thing, was it not? He had seen many a picture of murdering and killing before, he had looked on during that awful night at that castle in Inverness, with all its stealthy, blood-curdling horrors; but though those pictures were very dreadful and awe-inspiring they were not nauseous and revolting, the horrors were overshadowed by the majesty of a higher and an eternal world, and the effect was a wonderfully soothing and tranquillising

one. Asmus Semper felt, though all unconsciously, the difference between art and vulgar, sensation-alism.

But even Dierich Mattens and William Shakespeare, though they occupied so much space in Asmus's heart, were not able to displace two wishes, the wish, namely, for a little toy pistol with little caps that went pop when you pressed the trigger, and the wish for one of those gutta-percha balloons which you inflate by blowing into a little tube, and which will then make a noise that sounds something like "Mamma—Papaaaa." For a young man of eleven and a half years of age, who knew his Shakespeare, these two wishes were certainly rather childish ones; but they were not new ones, only old ones which for pecuniary reasons had never been fulfilled, and which he had carried about with him at many a fair with a look of sadness and of longing in his eyes. He had had a schilling at his disposal no doubt; but of course that had to be spent on the merry-go-round; it had been so from the beginning of time. But now, at last, most unexpectedly, it looked as if his wishes were about to be fulfilled. He had two *groschens* in hand already,—for the new ten-pfennige pieces were called *groschens*,—and when one day, quite by accident, he had been very diligent at his work of tobacco-stripping, his father gave him a third one. After this Asmus developed all at once quite a genius for preparing tobacco-leaves; the amount of work he got through was something marvellous, and he actually earned four, five, six *groschens*! And Herr Germer, the journeyman who had once promised him a book, gave him two *groschens*, so that made eight! And so it went on, until at last he had as much as eighteen *groschens*. Eighteen

groschens! He felt like the Schoolmaster in Lortzing's *Poacher* when he sings the song:

"Five thousand thalers!

Am I dreaming, am I waking!"

He was the owner of eighteen groschens, and no one knew anything about it! For it would never have entered the head of any one to imagine that a son of Ludwig Semper's would have been likely to have saved up any money. And now he thought out very carefully a plan of campaign, and carried it out to the letter. First of all, twenty pfennige for a toy pistol and a box of caps, then a gutta-percha balloon with music for ten pfennige, then, for twenty pfennige, rides on the merry-go-round, then, for ten pfennige, three shots in the shooting-gallery, then, for fifty pfennige, a buttered roll with salmon in it, then for twenty-five pfennige a pint of Erlanger beer, etc. etc., and finally, for ten pfennige, three cigars from Frau Föllmer's at the corner of the Papenstrasse. All things that he had been wishing for for ever so long, and had never been able to get! And about one thing he had quite made up his mind, and that was that with those eighteen groschens he was going to have a good time. For once in his life to live like a rich gentleman, like a prince, was his dream. Just as, when occasion offered, he would push all the raisins on his plate on to the edge, so that he might eat them all up at the same time, he now wished to enjoy all the pleasures and delights of the world at one and the same time.

The fair came, and the programme was carried out without a hitch. But Asmus made one mistake. He allowed his little brother Reinhold to share the fun, and took him with him when he went to buy the cigars from Frau Föllmer. This good,

conscientious woman—the horrid sneak!—considered it her duty four weeks after the event to ask Frau Semper why she wanted to buy cigars when they had so many at home. Asmus was in the next room when his mother was telling the rest of the family about the heinous sin he had committed, and he heard her. It was about twelve o'clock one hot summer's day, and the culprit lay down full length on the floor and pretended to be asleep. They would not disturb him when he was asleep, he thought. But the unexpected happened: Ludwig Semper - Macbeth murdered Sleep; he called out, "Do you-see that fellow, he is sleeping the sleep of the unjust! Don't pretend to be asleep, my son; get up at once!" And then something happened which Asmus would never have believed possible: Ludwig Semper cuffed his son on the head.

Asmus was thunderstruck. The blow had only been a slight one, had given him scarcely any pain; and yet it hurt him dreadfully all the same; the boy felt it all over his body. It was an odd thing, wasn't it? If his mother hit him with a yard-measure or a cooking-spoon he only felt it on his shoulder, or his back, or on his head, and he would shake off the blow with a smile; but a blow from his father, he felt that over the whole of his body, and light though it was he could not shake it off; it stuck fast and settled in his heart. He felt it as a great degradation; but he felt it much more as a great grief. And he pondered for a long time: "Why did he beat me?" Asmus was aware of the fact, of course, that Ludwig Semper would not allow his children to smoke at any price, and that he had forbidden them to once for all; but that was not nearly enough to account for his striking his

"golden apple." There must be some other reason that he did not see! And Asmus was soon to learn what that other reason was.

Meanwhile, the tale of disclosures was not yet at an end. When the seven-year-old Reinhold heard that the three cigars had come to light, he felt pleasantly stimulated to let out all about the other stolen pleasures, and now the past rose up, as it were, from the grave: the pistol, the salmon, the beer, etc. etc. This time Ludwig Semper said nothing; he only looked at his son for a while without uttering a sound. Johannes and Alfred made no end of jocular remarks. "Yes," they said, "you don't like work we know, you prefer a slice of salmon, don't you?" Or they called out: "A glass of Erlanger, please!" or, "Won't you come and have a shot, sir?" and so on *ad infinitum*. But Rebekka was the one to be most deeply affected by the shock. "Eighteen groschens!" she exclaimed once in a loud voice; and another time she said to herself in a very low voice: "Eighteen groschens! wasted in one afternoon! it would have kept us in food for nearly two days!" All this upset the boy to such an extent that at last he jumped out of bed in the middle of the night, gave a fearful yell, and shrieked in an agony of fear over and over again: "O God! I am wasting it! O God! I am wasting it!" It was not until his parents and his brothers, who were terribly alarmed, came to see what was the matter that he woke up out of his dream, and it took them a very long time indeed to pacify him. But that debt of eighteen groschens had now been cancelled once for all. Asmus never heard another word about it.

But he was soon to have another unusual experience

in connection with his father. Asmus was sitting at the work-table, and, to all appearances, was considering whether the next tobacco-leaf would bite him if he were to take hold of it—but in reality was wandering through the rock-hewn temples of Ellora, about which his master, Herr Cremer, had been telling him, when Ludwig Semper suddenly called out in a tone of great irritation, a tone in which he had never spoken to his favourite son before :

“Get up and be off with you ! I can’t stand such behaviour any longer !”

The tone in which this was said affected the boy’s feelings so much that he sat on his chair as if spell-bound, and said in an imploring voice, full of alarm : “Do let me stay here, please ; I would much rather work !”

“No, no !” exclaimed his father ; “off with you, I will do it myself.” And Asmus thought he caught a note of contempt in his voice. He felt it would be useless to resist, and that there was nothing left for him to do but to leave the workroom, so he slunk away.

He did not go to Dierich Mattens, he did not go into the street to his playmates ; he sat down on the staircase and wept bitterly because he was such a lazy boy, and could not manage to be industrious however much he tried, and because he was so horribly unlucky in every way. Whatever could be the reason why his father spoke to him in such an unusual tone and looked so different from what he usually did ? “Perhaps he is ill,” he thought.

And that was what it was, Ludwig Semper was ill. It was not long before Asmus heard that he did not sleep for whole nights at a stretch, and that he had to sit up in bed because he could not lie down for fear of being suffocated. A doctor, whom they called in,

said it was asthma, and prescribed something that did him no good. He was called in again and again, and prescribed other things that were of just as little use. "He knows just as much as I do," said Ludwig, "there is no remedy;" and from that time on he suffered and was silent. If an attack came on in the daytime he would go into a room where he could be alone. But at times Asmus would see him standing quite mute, and leaning forward with his arms pressed firmly on the table or the window-sill, and with his chest heaving violently, his eyes wide-open and dim with moisture staring straight in front of him, and drops of perspiration on his high, broad forehead.

Asmus saw clearly that he must alter his ways, and that however beautiful were the valleys and the hills of his dreams, he must avoid them, and with set teeth stick tight to the tobacco-room; and so he altered his ways.

He worked with such fanatical diligence that even Frau Rebekka was constrained to tell him occasionally that he had done enough, and that he had better go out and play. Then, to be sure, when his father had not had an attack for a week or two, and when Herr Cremer had been talking about Egypt, things got to such a pass that he would descend into the interior of the Pyramids by winding passages with a tobacco leaf in his hand. But then he had an experience, a strange experience.

CHAPTER XXXI

ASMUS HEARS A GOOD SERMON FOR THE SECOND TIME, SEES DEATH AND A FUNERAL FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND BECOMES A SCHOOLMASTER.

It chanced one day that he was quite alone in the workshop with Herr Germer, the consumptive journeyman who had offered him a book. The suffering man, with his sunken chest and the projecting cheek-bones, glanced up at him and smiled kindly.

"Heigh-ho!" he said in a voice that was almost kind, and not at all severe, "there he is at it again, a-sittin' still and a-doin' nothin'."

"Yes," said Asmus defiantly; "no wonder when one has to sit here stripping tobacco the whole day long!"

"Heigh-ho!" said the sick man in the same kind tone of voice, "the whole day long, indeed. You don't understan' in the least wot a good time yer havin'! I don't feel cross with yer 'cos you don't understan'. Though yer head's cute enough, you're only a child arter all. You've allus plenty ter eat, you've somethin' to pull over yer feet, and you go ter school every day like a prince, and yet you grizzle! You should 'er had a boyhood like mine. Heigh-ho! I don't wish it yer though, you're quite another kind o' chap from me, there's no denyin' o' that, but I'd like yer ter have it for jist two weeks, that you might

know wot it's like! . When I was five years old I had ter go inter the match-factory, and never had a shoe on my foot, and never got no meat, excep' when father caught a dog, and then, heigh-ho! didn't we have a feast jist! Other days we got pertaters with salt, and I genly stole the pertaters; and then when there was no pertaters, we had pertater skins. School indeed, heigh-ho! I'd jist like ter have seen father if I'd a wanted ter go to school instead o' workin'. A jolly good hidin' he'd a-given me! I wasna' more than a year at school altergither, and jist learnt ter write my name. An' yer musna' think I wor stupid; if teacher told us summat, I understood wot he meant at once. And when father died o' consumption, mother and us five childer had ter git along by oursels somehow. We stole mor'n we bought, you bet. Heigh-ho! when I think o' that time I allus wonders how I kep honest, and didna' go ter prison; and you go and grizzle! Why, you live like a count! You've sich good parents, an' wot a father you've got, heigh-ho! yer father's a man—he's much ter good for this 'ere world! And now he's sick, an' you worrit him so. You musna' think the man doesna' worrit 'cos he says nothin', the man worrits much more than yer think."

It was not necessary to play on this string in Asmus's heart for long; the tears were already rolling quietly and silently down his cheeks, great, round, silent, scalding tears. No priest or master of words could have struck the child's heart with a surer touch than had this poor, sick, absolutely uneducated man with his gentle, unassuming, almost timorous sermon.

"If I'd only a father like yourn," continued the preacher, "I'd go through fire and water for un!"

"And so would I!" cried out, in fact almost

shrieked out, Asmus, and throwing his arms down upon the table he began to sob violently.

"There now," said the journeyman appeasingly. "I didna' mean to say that; I didna' want ter hurt yer feelins, you musna' think that! If I havena' said it jist right you must excuse me; I've never had no learnin'. You're not a bad feller I'm sartin, but you don't know life yet, that's it. But you've got a tinder heart, and when a man's got a tinder heart things comes all right. There, don't you cry any more, there's a good lad. I didna' want ter make you cry. I tell yer wot, I've a couple o' books at home, I can't make nuthin' o' 'em, so I'll give 'em you; an' one o' these days when you come ter see me, my wife ull make you an omlet! 'cos I knows you likes 'em."

Asmus wiped the tears off his face.

"I'm going to be different now, too," he said. "I'm going . . ."

Then a workman came in, and Asmus bent his head over his work so that his red, swollen eyes should not be seen. •

He kept his word; that is to say as far as could be expected of a boy barely twelve years old, he kept his word. He was much more industrious, and no one could make out the reason why.

And from that time on, he and the man who had ventured to lecture him were fast friends. Asmus went to see him several times in his own home, and each time the man insisted that his wife should cook an omelette. Asmus did not like those omelettes at all; but for friendship's sake he used to make an effort and get them down somehow. Herr Germer owned a little pocket dictionary in two volumes, and one day he said to the boy:

"When I'm dead, and gone you shall have that dixshunry; who can tell wot may happen afore my little boy wants un."

"But you won't die for a long time," said Asmus, with a laugh.

"Heigh-ho!" said Herr Germer, also with a laugh. A week later he was lying in a hospital in Hamburg. The next Sunday Asmus marched off by himself to pay him a visit. On the black-board at the head of the sick man's bed was written: "Phthisis."

"That means consumption," said Germer.

"Oh, does it?" said Asmus sadly, and did not know what else he ought to say.

"We've all got consumption here," went on the sick man, indicating the other beds with his eyes.

It was a trying hour for Asmus. Lying in beds all round the room were men with hollow cheeks, pallid faces, with crimson patches on their sharp cheek-bones, and with lack-lustre eyes that stared at the little visitor with a strangely apathetic persistency as if he were the most interesting object in the whole room. Some were asleep; one was lying on his back, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and the counterpane over his chest rising and falling with a short rapid movement. Another one was walking about the room and conversing very cheerfully with the patients and the nurses.

"He fancies he'll git over it," said Herr Germer, with a smile in which ironical pity was to be read.

"In that bed over there a man died last night," he continued after a time.

The boy sent a timid glance at the bed, and a shudder passed through his young heart. But what seemed to him the most dreadful part of the whole

thing was the complete indifference displayed by the nurses, who were talking and laughing in the passage just outside the open door. It reminded him of the grave-diggers in *Hamlet*, who make jokes while they are digging a grave, and he said to himself: "It's no doubt because they are so accustomed to it all;" but he thought it very gruesome all the same.

He had intended to stay there for the whole of the two hours allotted to visitors; but after he had been there an hour his friend sent him away.

"It 'ud be jist as well for you to go now," said Germer; "this ain't a nice place fur childer."

"Oh—" said Asmus, not very heartily, it is true, "I shouldn't mind staying here at all."

"Nay, nay," said the sick man, with a smile, "you'd better go. At three o'clock my wife ull come, she can't git away from her place afore that. Remember me very kindly ter all of 'em, specially ter yer father! Tell him I allus liked his place better nor any other. And remember me to yer mother, she's a capable body. If yer father had only yer mother's energy he'd be a great man! Well, may you have success in life, my boy! I've an idea that you'll be somethin' one o' these days! You won't be a 'piependreher' for sartin sure! There, remember wot I've told you."

Asmus had almost reached the door when the sick man called out to him: "Remember me to the 'Cloud-Shifter,' won't yer. He's a fine feller. An' tell him he's to remember me to his sweetheart Ephigenia—wot d'yer call her?"

"'In Tauris,' or 'in Aulis,'" said Asmus conscientiously.

"All right." And Herr Germer gave a pleased

laugh at his own joke which brought on a fit of coughing.

"Good-byê. And I hope you will soon be well again," called out Asmus.

"I dur say I shall!" called back the sick man, still laughing and coughing. "I'll do my best."

When the boy had closed the last door of the huge house behind him, he set off home at a run, and it was not until he had been running for five minutes that he perceived he had taken a wrong turning. His one idea had been to move quickly, to feel how strong he was.

A fortnight later, Germer suddenly appeared in the Sempers' workshop. He had obtained leave of absence. He wanted to see the "shop" once more, he said. He stayed for two hours, and seemed as if he could not tear himself away; at last he said good-bye, after having made a present of his tools to the other workmen. They had declared, amid jokes and laughter, that he would soon want them back again; Germer's only answer had been a deprecatory gesture of the hand. Five days later his funeral took place.

It was the first funeral Asmus had attended. The amount of black: the blackness of the coffin, of the hearse, and of the bearers, seemed to him most objectionable. Why did everything look so horrid? "You can't feel properly sad," he thought. He was surprised he did not feel sadder. But when the coffin had been lowered into the grave, and earth was being thrown upon it, he felt a sudden sense of chill all over him; and then he thought: "Now we shall never see him again." And when he saw the dead man's wife crying, and his little son looking about him with a scared, bewildered look on his face, two big, scalding tears came into his

eyes. Then he went home with his father, his brother Johannes, and the Cloud-Shifter, and was quite silent the whole of the way. The Cloud-Shifter discussed the question as to why Schiller in his *Bride of Messina* had made use of the chorus. But Asmus kept silence. He thought: "Three months ago he talked to me in such a way that I could not keep from crying. How can he possibly have gone quite away all at once? He cannot have gone away all at once. I believe he is walking beside us; only we can't see him."

This was the fourth of Ludwig Semper's assistants who in the course of a few years had succumbed to that horrible scourge. Amongst these poor people were so many whose bodies were burthened with hereditary disease and were badly nourished besides, and the dust- and poison-laden atmosphere of the workshop was not calculated to improve the condition of their lungs. Asmus, even, had a cough sometimes that lasted for months, and made his head feel as if it would burst.

Taking them altogether, these workmen who passed along in front of the boy Asmus's quietly-observant eyes formed a strange, instructive, ever-changing procession. Every fresh workman he would observe furtively for some length of time, until he had made up his mind with regard to him. There came Danes, Swedes, Belgians, and Frenchmen, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, wide-awake, neatly-attired people, and drunkards, blackguards, and thieves, austere monarchists and frenzied regicides, thoughtful dreamers and brutal louts. One day, at noon, Asmus entered the workroom just as two brothers, in a terrible rage, were rushing at each other with knives in their hands. He uttered a

loud scream and they desisted. At one time one of the men employed by his father was almost an idiot. This was when Ludwig Semper had so much work on hand that he required another stripper, and the stripper he engaged was known as "Hannis mit de Klock," because he was the owner of a watch which was about the size of a small saucer, and this watch was his joy and pride, his one source of delight. He attached it firmly to his body by means of tapes and string, so that no one could possibly get it away from him. Of course the village boys took a wicked delight in shouting out every time they caught sight of him :

"I say, Hannis, what o'clock is it?"

And then Hannis could not contain his sense of pride; with endless trouble he would disengage his treasure and tell them the correct time within half a minute. As a matter of course, the Semperian employes teased him unmercifully, and this Asmus did not like. He pitied the poor fellow immensely, much more in fact than there was any occasion for, he even went so far as to feel a real affection for him. He still looked at things from a child's standpoint, and fancied that no one can be happy or of any use in the world unless he is clever. Consequently, not only did he do his best to protect his protégé, but he talked to him on serious subjects, told him what he had learnt at school about the obliqueness of the ecliptic and about the extension of the predicate, in the belief that he might help to cure his mind.

It was absolutely impossible, in fact, for Asmus to keep to himself the vast amount of information he was acquiring from Herr Cremer, his present master. Not only did he report regularly to his father the

doings of Lycurgus and Solon, of Marius and Sulla but he also made a blackboard out of a big piece of wood, and having procured a piece of chalk gave a course of instruction to the employes. They were very apt pupils, listened with the greatest attention and answered as if they had been children; and poor Germer, who had scarcely been able to write his name, had been one of the cleverest, and had even learnt to distinguish the indirect object from the extension of the predicate. The most diligent and the most ambitious was a man from Rostock, who had the head of a Shakespeare. He took extra lessons on Sundays, and at the end of two years he could not tell the difference between a substantive and the subject of a sentence. But he would never say die, his wish was to force his understanding by main force through the dense mass, and he took more and more lessons, and Asmus thought: "Surely after a time it must get into his head," and with renewed courage he stormed the difficult citadel over and over again, but he could not succeed in forcing an entrance. When Asmus asked: "Well now, what part of speech is 'and'?" the Shakespearian head would look at him with shining eyes and shout out: "Imperative," or some similar word; and all his life long he never became more intelligent.

CHAPTER XXXII

ABOUT THAT SPLENDID MAN, HERR CREMER, ABOUT A
MAGNIFICENT PAIR OF TROUSERS, AND ABOUT
WONDERFUL MOB ORATORS.

ONCE there was amongst the cigar-makers a girl, a young, good-looking girl called Jette, who prepared the tobacco for the men. The men made jokes which Asmus did not understand, jokes at which they laughed loudly and coarsely. Jette, too, bent her head down very low over her work and giggled. Once when Asmus was standing at the press and turning it, he made a remark at which Jette as well as the men broke out into shouts of laughter. The boy turned round in astonishment; he could not imagine what he could have said that was so funny; but he felt they were laughing at something improper, secret, forbidden.

That much he understood, because such things were never said in the presence of his father. Ludwig Semper had no need to forbid conversation of that sort; his mere presence was sufficient to prevent it.

But Asmus was already aware that there was something connected with the relation of the sexes that was kept from children, which must not be spoken about, which it was dreadfully improper and wicked either to do or make a subject of conversation. He had lost the complete innocence with which he had

been accustomed to regard the two different kinds of human beings, and the chief instrument had been the Bible. In the top class, under Herr Cremer, the Bible was used, and very considerably too. Every day he made the boys learn three to five long passages from it; this Asmus managed by reading them through once before the Scripture lesson—then he knew them by heart. And in the Bible, with sly looks and smiles, the boys would point out to each other all sorts of interesting passages.

In Herr Cremer's class, too, there was no lack of religious instruction, not according to the views of the constituted authorities, at all events, and they were of the opinion that a child's mind ought to be stuffed with texts, hymns, and religious instruction until it had been, as it were, fattened on piety. But in Herr Cremer's class there was one quite excellent thing, and that was Herr Cremer himself.

Herr Cremer was, to put it concisely, a splendid man. Though past middle age, almost an old man in fact, he was more full of life and energy than the majority of young men. He looked like a count of ancient lineage; his manners were simple and he was pleasant to every one. His cane was only a very small one, and was split, and he had kept it together for years by binding string round it. With this cane he would whack the boys when necessary in a kind and paternal manner, and even the biggest lout in the class had the greatest veneration for him. This is enough to show what manner of man he was. He was good-looking, but not good-looking according to a shop-girl's idea; his right eye was set considerably deeper than his left one, but the glance he sent from under his projecting brows reminded you of an eagle under an over-hanging cliff. And with that eagle glance, when he was angry, his

quivering nostrils, his beautifully-shaped, aristocratic looking head with its close-cropped grey hair and his iron-grey beard, he looked like a kind-hearted Duke of Alba or a Wallenstein. Herr Cremer was pious too, honestly and truly pious, and yet in the course of a year this man set his boys about seven hundred texts and twenty-five hymns to learn by heart, and made each of the five Scripture lessons last an hour and a half instead of an hour.

He believed in his mission too, in the sacredness and the usefulness of his calling, and, when a man holds that belief, all his words and all his deeds are pervaded with the ardour of his faith. Led by this man's hand Asmus Semper traversed the spacious halls and picture-galleries of history with leisurely, dreamily-tarrying steps, and with wide-open, enchanted eyes. For on the lips and in the eyes of the narrator things long dead came to life again; the peoples and the empires, the temples and the battlefields of the past, Sennacherib and Sesostris, the fierce rushing tempest of the Migration of Nations, and that wonderful march of the peoples of the Occident towards the Orient under Godfrey of Bouillon,—all came to life again. This man had the power of bringing things before your mind's eye with the greatest vividness. His breath could make the Levant or Ultima Thule, the Punjaub or the Oasis of Sirvah into living realities; and he would give eloquent accounts, too, of the date-palm and the sugar-cane, of cinnamon and cassia. Little wonder, therefore, that the hungering, thirsting Asmus clung with all the sucking organs of his soul to this man's soul. Unfortunately, however, the most vivid description will not enable you to see a cassia-bush, and the High School of Oldensund possessed only three objects that could be

used for teaching purposes, and these were a Panama hat, a China-silk coat—these two were the property of Herr Cremer—and an air-pump. In the summer, when it was very fine and very warm, Herr Cremer would appear in his China-silk coat and his Panama hat, and when the lesson had to do with America he would give them the Panama hat to examine, and when it had to do with Asia he would show them the coat. A rogue gives away more than he has. But the air-pump had not cared about experiments for centuries. It hissed and mewed and spit at the slightest attempt to make it work, and when you had extracted the air from the front part it would let it in again in a most cunning, deceitful manner through a fresh hole somewhere or other.

The very first moment they began to work together, moreover, there was a struggle between Herr Cremer and Asmus. Herr Cremer had given his pupils five or six reasons to prove that the earth must be round, and had then told them to write them from memory. Asmus wrote down one reason, and then put underneath it "etc." For, he said: "What is proved is proved, and it is absurd to prove a thing five times, and only makes it look as if the proofs were very poor ones." Herr Cremer, however, looked upon this "etc." as a proof of more than ordinary indolence, and did not trouble to conceal his view of the matter. But it was not very long before the two understood one another perfectly, and became the best of friends.

However, little Asmus, for fear that he might get too conceited and bumptious, had never been allowed too much luck. If Fortune offered him a delicious bit of cake, she allowed him to take one bite, and then snatched it away, and no doubt her intentions were of the best, only the boy failed to

understand and appreciate them. In this class also Asmus's manner and behaviour in general attracted attention. He refused to be friendly with those whom he did not care for, and it was considered excessively impertinent of him to fly over the heads of quite a number of hoary-headed, worthy old gentlemen, who had been in the class for ages, and had consequently a better right to the best places than this upstart. And, strange to say: it was again to be an article of apparel that sprang the mine. As long as he was wearing the grey trousers, Asmus was quite safe, was superior to the others in fact. These trousers—which had been given to his sister Adelheid by her mistress—were of an elegant simplicity, were dandified, might have been worn at Court, were worthy, in fact, of the Prince of Wales. In accordance with the fashion prevailing at that time they were very narrow, and showed off Asmus's legs, which were well-formed and almost straight, to perfection. It is easy to understand why he got into the way of walking with bent head; how could he possibly help looking at those trousers! it was the first time he had ever had such a pair. In the days of those trousers, he went three times to the tavern between the railway embankments, in the hope that he might find the little Greek Queen; but he hoped and waited in vain. One unlucky day, however, when he was playing quite close to a factory where they made machinery, and was enjoying himself immensely, he forgot all about his trousers, and knelt down in a puddle composed of a mixture of iron-dust, soot, and machine-oil. Mother Rebekka's shriek of dismay and the thrashing she gave him were the smallest part of the trouble—the crushing part was that

the stains resisted all attempts at removal. A source of happiness, a real genuine source of happiness had been destroyed, and he himself had destroyed it in a moment of criminal carelessness! Now he was obliged to wear his overcoat, whereas before he had preferred being frozen with cold to covering up his beloved trousers. But this overcoat, which had been intended for much bigger things than to cover up Asmus Semper, came down almost to his ankles, and hid the dreadful stains. This overcoat had such a grown-up look about it that a gentleman who had to give an order to Asmus addressed him as "sir." Asmus felt quite important, and thought: "I must look very big in this overcoat." But that was the only pleasure he was to get out of this article of apparel. As soon as he appeared at school in it there was a shout of, "Hurrah for Trudel and his overcoat!" and his former sufferings recommenced. The mine had been sprung, and through the whole of that long, long winter its fire burnt his skin, and then burnt away the flesh until it reached his heart; and Ferdinand Lassalle gave the finishing touch.

The Lassalle cult had gained a footing in the Semperian "shop." Johannes was a constant subscriber to the *Social Democrat*, and would often read aloud from it in a very emphatic manner. He went less frequently to the opera and to concerts, and evidently preferred attending public meetings, and one morning he gave them all a description of the magnificent manner in which Hasenclever, Hasselmann, and Most had spoken. The Cloud-Shifter was also advancing by swift strides by way of Liberalism to Social Democracy; at that moment he had got as far as Gervinus. The other employes

who passed through the Semperian workroom were undoubtedly Radicals in some form or other, on the side of the poor and against the rich, on the side of the low and against the high, on the side of the laity and against the priests. How could it be otherwise with poor laymen of low estate? Still they did not accept as gospel all that Hasenclever told them; they would dispute about it, or one of them would be deputed to challenge the opinion of the *Bourgeois*, and bring forward arguments against Social Democracy. Then they would carry on exciting debates; for they believed that debates would bring them nearer to the truth, or if not to the truth at any rate to their deliverance. When Ludwig Semper was well he listened to all that was said with bright, flashing eyes, in which there was often a far-away look; and very seldom said a word. He liked reading Bebel's speeches, but he also liked reading Lasker's or Windhorst's if they were at all witty or eloquent. It gave him pleasure to listen to violent speeches against tyrants and blood-suckers, he was an enthusiastic admirer of Danton, theoretically and generally speaking on the side of revolution, provided there was no hurry about it, and it was carried on in a decorous and humane manner. On one point he agreed unconditionally with his employes: he could not endure Bismarck. He was too un-Semperian.

Johannes, however, soon held a confidential post under the Oldensund Political Union, and was often honoured with visits from the chief men of the different political parties and from mob orators. Of these one very fat one went by the name of "Ganz Deutschland" (The Whole of Germany), because a favourite remark of his was:

"My name is known throughout the whole of Germany." He was a kind-hearted, pleasant man, and once stroked Asmus's hair caressingly, so that Asmus felt a shiver of veneration run all over him. For the boy looked at all these men out of the corners of his eyes with a feeling of timid, wondering veneration, for could not they stand in front of thousands of people and talk to them for hours! A great fund of childlike piety lay hidden in the little fellow's heart, and it was his firm belief that the men who could speak at meetings of that description must be the wisest ones.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHY ASMUS WROTE THE BIOGRAPHY OF FERDINAND LASSALLE, WHY HE DID NOT SUCCEED IN GETTING TO THE TOP OF HIS CLASS, AND WHY HE TOOK ST. PAUL'S JOURNEYS OVER AGAIN.

AND then a day came when he was allowed to go to one of these meetings! It was not a political meeting certainly, it was a meeting in honour of the dead Lassalle. As soon as the boy entered the long, dimly-lighted hall he stood quite still, awestruck by what he saw at the other end. The whole of the wall was occupied by a most wonderful picture. It was a tableau with a transparent curtain in front of it. Lying stretched out at full length on a bed was a handsome-looking man with a moustache. His arms were lying on a counterpane, his eyes were shut; evidently a man who was either dying or already dead. It was Lassalle. All over the room, which was decorated with garlands and flags, the gas was only half turned on, and crape was wound round everything. Here and there hung transparencies on which the pithy mottoes of the new doctrines were to be read in letters of light. On the platform was a white bust crowned with laurel; but Asmus could not take his eyes off the dead man, who, in his opinion, had died for the poor, and his heart was filled with pity, sorrow, reverence, gratitude, and enthusiasm. Then the

entertainment commenced: songs—the singing of which was very bad, poems—the reciting of which was still worse, and speeches; then songs, poems, and speeches again, three obituary speeches, each of which lasted an hour. It was midnight before it was over. Every now and again, and more frequently towards the end of the evening, “Ganz Deutschland” had to ascend the rostrum and shout out: “Ladies and gentlemen, I must request you to be silent!” But as soon as he had left it, amid a storm of bravos from the audience, the uproar would begin again at the buffet, round which most of the men had congregated for the purpose of talking and drinking beer; the audience in the body of the hall was composed almost entirely of women and children. Suddenly—the whole hall was already a surging sea of tobacco-smoke, confusion of voices, and the fumes of beer—suddenly a lean young man, who held himself very stiffly, ascended the rostrum, and that young man was Heinrich Moldenhuber. His eyes must be deceiving him surely! The Cloud-Shifter who sat with them every day in the workshop, out of whose pockets he used to extract apples when they were living in the *Düstere lange Balken*—could he really be one of those great men who could speak in public? And he was not in the least nervous either, he pushed out his under-lip, smiled, and began to speak. Asmus listened with the greatest attention, but did not hear much that he could understand, for it was about half-past eleven o'clock when Moldenhuber was talking about Gervinus and his *Introduction to the History of the Nineteenth Century*, and at the buffet the talk and the consumption of beer had been increasing steadily in volume. Then “Ganz Deutschland” got up

and requested them to be silent, and after that there were some more songs and recitations. At last, in the midst of all the fumes and hubbub, Asmus ceased to pay attention to anything but to the quiet man on his death-bed, at whom he gazed silently. That was the part of the evening's entertainment that gave him the most satisfaction. For days and nights afterwards this picture continued to rise up before his mind's eye, and at last he was obliged to give expression to it; having no other paper, he made use of his school scribbling-book, and wrote down in it from memory, and trembling with excitement, an account of the life and death of Ferdinand Lassalle.

Now all his life long Asmus had never been famous for tidiness, and thus it came to pass that a month or two later he forgot all about his scribbling-book and left it behind him at school. The next morning it was pounced upon by one of his school-fellows, who showed it to the other boys. They discovered Lassalle's biography, and could not contain their delight. Herr Cremer would have to see it, there was no doubt of that, for, in his Scripture lessons Herr Cremer had often been very down upon people who held democratic opinions and did not profess any religious faith.

At that time, even among the working classes, Socialism had only a few adherents, and children had not yet taken to politics.

Herr Cremer took the exercise-book, read the enthusiastic monograph, and then put the whole thing into the stove. Immediately after, Asmus entered the room. He felt at once that the attention of the whole class was centred upon him, a spiteful, watchful, and not very loving

attention: piercing eyes and tense lips. Herr Cremer did not make the slightest reference to the affair, he gave his lessons as usual, and asked Asmus questions as often and in as kindly a manner as ever. For this bitter disappointment the boys had to obtain compensation, and at the very next recreation-interval they set about it. They substituted Lassalle for Trudel. "Hurrah! look there, Lassalle with the overcoat!" they shouted. "I say, Lassalle, make a speech, do! Lassalle, are yer a Jew? Lassalle, I say!" True, he was not so roughly handled as before; Herr Cremer held a firm hand protectingly over each one of his pupils. The torture that he suffered now was of a more refined description. He was sent to Coventry, made to feel he was a wicked boy whom every one must avoid.

"Just take care," said a small farmer's son, "he'll bag everything yer have! Keep an eye on your bread-and-butter! My father says the Decimalcroats don't want no work, but want to get money without!" But his sufferings were greatest when Herr Cremer from time to time, in accordance with what he considered his duty, spoke reprovingly of unbelievers, of people who were not contented with their own lot, and of demagogues, and held them up to ridicule or scorn. Then Asmus felt: "Now they are all thinking of you," and whenever the boys got the chance they would cast furtive glances at him, or stare at him with a malicious expression on their faces, so that he felt horribly shy and ashamed and did not know in which direction to look. "He don't believe in no God," they said of him, and avoided him as if he had been a leper.

Herr Cremer always concluded little addresses of this kind with one formula. When he had proved the existence of God, or the absolute necessity of monarchical government or of the existing social system, by arguments which were very striking and could not be gainsaid, he would conclude with :

"Are not all demagogues and agitators perfectly well aware of this? Of course they are! Why don't they behave as if they were? 'Wouldn't suit their book!'"

And that settled the matter.

Though Herr Cremer knew perfectly well what sort of little sprite was busy in little Semper's brain, and was most undoubtedly exerting considerable influence over the child, it was not very long before Asmus sat upon the front form and was third in the class. But then it was decreed: Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed. Asmus would never be able to get any higher; the two above him were invincible.

The first one was his superior in tidiness and in religion. His clothes were always in perfect order, his exercises were always without a fault, his writing was excellent, his answers were always absolutely correct; in fact, he was perfect in every direction, and was a good fellow into the bargain. And with regard to religion he believed everything he had been taught, without exception. Herr Cremer might ask for whatever dogma he pleased, Julius Tipp always professed it. Asmus would often stare at him with amazement. He so often thought himself: "One might answer that question in all sorts of ways." But not a bit of it; Julius Tipp always gave Herr Cremer exactly the answer

he wanted, and always in Herr Cremer's very own words.

If Herr Cremer asked :

"Are not all demagogues and agitators perfectly aware of this?" Julius would answer :

"Of course they are."

And when Herr Cremer's next question was :

"But why don't they behave as if they were?"

Then the *primus* would say :

"Wouldn't suit their book."

There was no getting rid of him, that was certain. He was a fixture. He was the *primus omnium*. Later on he became a stationmaster.

And the second boy was better than Asmus both in arithmetic and in good conduct. With regard to arithmetic it was not so very serious, Asmus could have caught him up if he had exerted himself a little; but with regard to good conduct it was quite a different matter. The *secundus omnium* had the most extraordinary gift of being able to keep up a conversation and eat his lunch while school was going on. He could munch and swallow invisibly, and when he had something to tell his neighbour Asmus he knew how to watch slyly and patiently for the moment when Herr Cremer's eyes were turned in a totally different direction. But Asmus was of much too excitable a nature to wait for an equally favourable opportunity; he would always answer on the spur of the moment, or when Herr Cremer asked him what were the functions of the Holy Ghost, would be just upon the point of popping a cherry into his mouth, and then, with a lowering glance of his eagle eye, Herr Cremer would shout out :

"Asmus Semper; come here!!!"

Then Asmus had to climb out of the form, to stand by the side of the Duke of Alba's desk, and to look at the wall. Asmus had the pleasure of having about one thousand Scripture lessons from Herr Cremer, and had to stand many hundred times at that desk and contemplate the wall. But on the wall there hung a large map of Europe, and that helped to pass the time delightfully. On the map was Asia Minor with Palestine. Sometimes Asmus would commence proceedings by taking a walk round the Dead Sea. His eyes would wander slowly up along the rugged, rocky shore to which such dreary horror clung, and would then gaze across the water, creeping along in such gruesome silence, to where Sodom and Gomorrah had once lived and revelled. Then he would halt at Penuel, where Jacob wrestled with the Lord until "the hollow of his thigh was out of joint"; then at Kirjath-jearim, where the ark was kept; then at Sycar, where Jesus sat with the woman beside the well; then at Nain, where he saw quite distinctly Christ going up to the widow whose only son was dead, and heard Him say: "Weep not." When He said that there was no more weeping. Then Asmus went on to Cana in Galilee, where a wedding was taking place, and the Lord sat amongst the other guests, bright and cheerful and like one of themselves, and smiling at their merriment. There was also a plan of Jerusalem on the map, and with a look of fear in his eyes Asmus tarried on the Hill of Offence and the Hill of Evil Council; then he hurried on along the shore of the Lake of Tiberias, a shore kept green for all time by the joy that suffuses it, until he came to

the Mount of Beatitudes, which looks down into the lake with such a smiling aspect. And from Antioch Asmus set out again and joined Saul of Tarsus as he journeyed, accompanying him during those long missionary journeys, such long journeys, through the dust and beneath the blazing sun, through loneliness and want, through suffering and persecution, and yet journeys during which it was always bright and light. All of them like that walk to Emmaus, the sun shining brilliantly on the road and on the hills, the mysterious light of Heaven in his heart. It seemed to little Semper that these early days of Christianity must have been one long, delightful holiday. The Christians in those days believed in everything they taught and for which they died; they had no doubt about anything, they were all of one mind; and where that is the case, light is omnipresent, God is omnipresent. During those centuries everything is suffused with light and joy, the crypts of the secret communities as well as dungeons and arenas, martyrdom, too, and death. "Behold, I am with you for all time, until the end of the world!" Those were the words that went ringing through the centuries from Domitian to Diocletian. There seemed nothing dreadful or horrible to him about the persecutions of the Christians; he only saw on the martyrs' brows the glory of the morning light towards which their souls were hastening. Asmus himself was quite ready to die—for his father, if need be, he would die most willingly. He would like to hear some day: "Your father must die!" Then he would say: "I will die; let my father live." But in the meantime he was going with Paul to Paphos

and Iconium, to Lystra and Derbe, to Thessalonica and Ephesus. He saw the uproar and confusion in the streets which the silversmith had excited, and heard the crowd cry out: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"—and all at once he heard a voice out of the crowd asking:

"Can you tell me the five articles of the Christian Faith, Asmus Semper?"

It was Herr Cremer who was calling him away from Ephesus. Asmus was not able to answer, so Herr Cremer took hold of his ear, and pulling him away from Ephesus back to Oldensund, cried out: "Do you mean to say you are not paying attention yet, you rascal?" and then he gave him a slap on the mouth because he had shown such ignorance with regard to religion. And yet it was nothing but religion that he had been studying in Syria and Asia Minor, in Macedonia and Hellas; pure, undefiled religion, though not quite the same as the religion taught by Herr Cremer. That religion he did not like, that religion he did not believe in, he could not die for that, no, indeed he could not.

He had listened long enough and attentively enough to Herr Cremer's religious teaching. He was aware that the people at home believed either very little or nothing at all of what his master taught; he had imbibed a quantity of radical, rationalistic ideas and words; many of his father's workmen had even called all religion nonsense, and priests humbug. But in spite of all this he had listened with intense eagerness to all Herr Cremer said, had kept his attention on the stretch to learn from this excellent man all that was true and right. And Herr Cremer himself was a capital teacher, interested in his work and capable of interesting his pupils; a teacher who did all that

was humanly possible to clothe the dry bones of dogmatism with living flesh. And Asmus listened, and stretched the skin of his forehead, and dragged all his attention to the front as if his brain had to make its way out through his eyes—and yet he could not grasp what Herr Cremer taught. Oddly enough, Julius Tipp, the top boy, seemed able to; so also did Ewald Knapp, the second one, apparently; and many of the others who were much stupider than he. He always felt: "He is not obliged to say what he does say, he could say something different." When Herr Cremer cited something in proof of some assertion Asmus used to think: "He could make those words prove all sorts of other things." It seemed to him that Herr Cremer simply talked for the sake of talking—so little did he understand him, so little was the faithful, straightforward, clever Herr Cremer able to convince him. That God could be one and also three, and then one again, Asmus could not understand. That Jesus was man and yet not man, God and yet not God, he could not understand either. That one could die for love of others—that he could understand, that he had felt most intensely when that poor creature, Herr Rösing, was reading to them about the sufferings of Christ; but that His death could redeem mankind, that on account of this suffering the sins of others would be forgiven—that, he would never be able to understand, even though Herr Cremer were to go on talking for ever and ever. Asmus Semper knew the answers that his master expected to have to his questions perfectly, the answers that Julius Tipp and the other boys gave him. He knew very well that when Herr Cremer asked:

"Why did Christ descend into hell?" he ought to answer:

"To take the Gospel to the souls of the unbaptized and to take away the power of the Devil."

But Asmus did not answer. He had the whole Catechism at his finger-ends; yet he did not answer because he thought to himself: "If I answer he will think I believe it;" and the thought of that was inexpressibly revolting to him. He was too fond of his teacher to deceive him; he was too proud, also, to say anything that he did not believe, and which he disliked intensely on account of the obtrusive way in which it was put before him and forced upon him. Once a year the School Inspector—a clergyman—came and examined them for forty minutes in dogma and five minutes in science. Asmus never answered. Once even, the Superintendent-General of the Province came,—a patriarch whose round face was like a tray full of all sorts of sweet things,—but even his questions Asmus did not answer. He preferred to be considered stupid, idle or inattentive, to giving answers that seemed to him like confessions of faith.

Now and again, he was obliged to say the prayer. For the prayer at the commencement and end of school had to be said by the boys in turns. Hundreds and hundreds of times Asmus thought: "Just you say to him: 'Please, sir, I cannot pray, I do not want to pray, I don't believe in prayer.'" Those were terrible, most distressing moments when Asmus was obliged to bend his head, fold his hands, and pretend to be pious. It seemed to him that he was very wicked, cowardly, and deceptive; but he did not dare to refuse. For he had a vague dread that the effect of that might be a great catastrophe, that he might lose his master's affection for ever; and his life at school become unbearable. And yet he prayed sometimes on his own account. He would go into a room where he would

be quite by himself, would fold his hands and would say:

"Dear God, tell me please if Thou art really there—give me a sign—then I am quite sure I shall believe in Thee all my life long. . . ."

*But no sign came. Consequently, every Scripture lesson continued to be an hour and a half of torture, during which he used to feel absolutely ill unless a merciful fit of lassitude came over him, or he remembered suddenly, with intense delight, that he had butter on his bread or a plum or two in his pocket. Then he would begin cautiously to eat his lunch, but no sooner had he taken one bite than his master would shout out: "Asmus Semper, come here!!!" and then he would go on missionary journeys again, and would become a Christian again on the Mount of Olives or on the Lake of Gennesaret.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ASMUS SEMPER AS DON GIOVANNI, THEATRE DIRECTOR,
AND SUPERFLUOUS POET.

THIS torture which he had to endure five days in every week dragged on through interminable years; for on this stage of culture Asmus Semper had to spend four years—the reason being that, at Oldensund, there was no higher one to which he could climb. But fortunately the other hours during those four years did not seem interminable, but, on the contrary, very short and very pleasant. Herr Cremer had no bodyguard—no Strelitzers to organise a persecution of little schoolfellows who were cleverer than themselves, and to make it their special study and profession; the tooth of time gnawed at Asmus's overcoat; grass grew over the life and death of Ferdinand Lassalle, and gradually, even here, the smaller-minded people discovered that this Semper was quite a different fellow from what they had imagined. Ten or twelve of them founded a Singing Club; and Asmus Semper was unanimously proclaimed manager and conductor. Far away behind the Holstenloch, where only the cows could hear them, close by a gate leading into a meadow, they practised. They perched themselves on the fence, Asmus stood in front of them and conducted, and they sang:—

“Laue Lüfte fühl' ich wehen,
Göldner Frühling taut herab,”

and after they had finished singing they discussed the question of procuring a banner, for without a banner how could they be a club? They smoked a considerable amount of tobacco, but even then no brilliant idea entered their heads. Asmus Semper's thoughts, however, were occupied with a very different subject.

These singers held a very minor place in a grand plan he had thought out. He intended to do something immense. His wish was to rehearse *Don Giovanni*, and to give a performance of it—nothing less than that. And not with marionettes either, but with living men and women.

He himself had neither seen nor heard *Don Giovanni*; if he had, this work of Messrs. Mozart and La Ponte might have seemed to him to be slightly too huge an undertaking. No; he had only heard Johannes. Johannes had enjoyed this wonderful opera, and had given them a vivid description of it, had told them about the murder of the Commander, about the three Masks at the ball, about the invitation to the Statue, about the way the earth shook under his tread when he appeared, and about Don Giovanni's descent into the infernal regions. Johannes had sung Don Giovanni, and then Octavio had come to life in Ludwig again, and then Johannes sang Leporello's part, and then Ludwig drew himself up in a threatening attitude, as if he were Donna Anna, and sang:—

“Now know the betrayer
Who aimed at mine honour,
Now learn who was slayer
Of this life's dear donor.
To vengeance I call thee,
Need love call for more!”

And then Asmus was completely bowled over. He

wanted to take the part himself of Don Giovanni. Wasn't he manager and conductor! He could not have told any one what kind of shame the Commander's daughter was threatened with, and he did not understand why Masetto objected so strongly to Don Giovanni dancing with Zerlina. His was a Don Giovanni with the almost unsullied heart of a child. But he wanted to fight the Commander and to kill him in grand style, and when the Statue seized hold of his wrist and cried out: "Repent!" he felt he should like to shout out "No!" so that it would sound loud and shrill through all the spacious rooms. Johannes should make the music on a piano—as yet Asmus did not inquire whether he would be able or willing to. Members of his Singing Club were to take the parts of Octavio, the Commander, and Masetto; the slender Christiane must play Donna Anna. Ah! if he could only see the little Queen of the Mainotti—she, with her mournful eyes, would have to be Elvira! He doubted, though, whether he would be able to treat her as badly as Don Giovanni had. For Leporello he would get Ewald Knapp, because he could manage to munch so quietly that no one noticed it. And the scenery?—oh, he would arrange about that somehow! For the nonce, he painted it in the air with a glance of his eyes; the vestibule in the Governor's palace—the brilliantly-lighted golden ballroom in Don Giovanni's house—the tomb of the murdered man on which the pale moonbeams shone. So full of all this was he that he had to unburden his heart to his friend Dierich Mattens.

"Man," he cried, "have you read *Don Giovanni*?"

"No," replied Dierich, opening his eyes very wide.

"Young 'un, man, that's grand, I tell yer! 'Don

Giovanni comes along and wants to run away with Donna Anna, and then comes the Commander and sings:—

“ ‘Wretch, worse than vicious,
Draw and defend thee!’ ”

and Don Giovanni sings:—

“ ‘Steel were too precious,
Words would offend thee.’ ”

And then they’ve a fight, and then Don Giovanni kills him, an’ there comes Donna Anna, an’ Octavio, an’ Elvira,—and he does run away with her; he has run away, too, with a dozen or so of others—he comes to the ball in a mask, and then they want to kill him; but he sticks out his sword an’ cuts ’em all to pieces—him quite by hissel’ agin all the lot o’ ’em, and then off he goes to the churchyard and invites the dead Commander: ‘Will yer be my guest?’—and then, man, then the moon shines on the stone Statue, and it begins to sing all at once, and sings—

“ ‘Y-e-a-a-a . . .’ ”

And, sure enough, when Don Giovanni was havin’ a jolly good time the Statue comes an’ tells him he must turn over a new leaf; but he won’t, and then the Commander sinks down into the earth, and the Furies come out of all the corners and ride along with him ter hell.—Man, that’s grand, I tell yer.”

Dierich had been regarding his little friend out of the corner of his eye with a more and more hopeless and anxious look upon his face; now, when Asmus was silent, he stared straight in front of him for a time, and then said very quietly:—

“What yer’ve been talkin’ about is just stuff and rubbish!”

That was a terrible blow to Asmus. He stared at Dierich for a time with wide-open eyes, said good-bye all of a sudden, and took his departure. With his great, heavy paw Dierich had trampled on the slides of a magic-lantern, and the man who was managing the magic-lantern was much put out thereby. With his desecrated dreams he fled away, and took refuge in solitude where he could dream unmolested.

A few days later, while Ewald Knapp and Arnold Diepenbrock were conversing in the playground, he caught the word "theatre." He went up to them, and with dilated eyes heard that Arnold Diepenbrock had had a big marionette theatre given to him. This Arnold was of the race of those Diepenbrocks to whom the moon belonged which used to hang so often and with such a kind, gentle aspect over the Kurze Elend. This scion of the race of moon-owners now possessed a theatre therefore, and he was talking about it with great affection and delight. Asmus's theatre had come to grief long ago; little Adalbert having assisted greatly in the process, for, like a modern Caligula, he showed an irresistible inclination to put all the puppets into his mouth and to bite off their heads. In the afternoon of that very same day three heads were knocking about amongst the treasures of the new theatre, and the thickest and hottest of them belonged to Asmus Semper. As they were three true German boys the first thing they did was to confer upon themselves the title of directors, and as they also possessed the qualities of German thoroughness and exactitude, each of these titles differed slightly from the other. Knapp succeeded in building a powder-tower for Zriny which could be made to explode by means of a squib, and could then be built up again

without showing a flaw; he received the name of "Technical Director." Semper, who had read most things, and had recited Schiller's *Fire* in school in such an excellent fashion that the boys almost fancied they could see the fire, was the "Art Director." And on Diepenbrock was bestowed the title of "Proprietor." The theatre was only open on Sundays, like the Prince Regent's Theatre in Munich, and the price of the tickets was five, two, and one pfennig. It was stowed away in a shed, and Asmus had insisted that over the entrance door of the playhouse (in which on week-days spades, axes, saws, and rakes lived their silent life) the words "Apollini et Musis" should be written.

Unfortunately the Diepenbrock's pigsty was next to the shed, and when Asmus, who was crouched down in a corner behind the stage and was reciting the whole drama from beginning to end, shouted out, with burning cheeks and the greatest enthusiasm, "A nation of brothers we will be"—the excited pigs screeched—"ouit, oui-e-e-e-e-t, ou-e-e-e-e-e-t." And when Asmus went on, "Will faithful be whate'er betide"—the pigs put in loyally—"Nuff, nuff, nuff!" •

And here was another instance of the fact that genuine enthusiasm dwells in inaccessible temples. When Asmus floated up on wide-stretched wings out of the corner of his shed he did not hear his neighbours, his ears were filled with strains from another world, he breathed an ethereal atmosphere. As long as they played interesting pieces like *Tell*, *Der Freischütz*, and *Zriny*, everything went off splendidly; but Asmus added *Emilia Galotti* to the repertoire, as well as *Egmont* and *Iphigenia*, and then the audience made more noise even than the

pigs. Those who had paid their money rebelled, and insisted that when such beastly dull pieces were played they must have it back again. And the worst and most painful part of the affair was that on this point the management was not unanimous. Diepenbrock was large-minded, and willing to make sacrifices for art in its higher forms; but Knapp was a Philistine and agreed with the audience. He wanted plays with some "go" in them; the stuff Asmus recited in that corner of his bored him immensely. Finally, when Diepenbrock began to waver Asmus addressed his co-managers as follows:—

"Dear people, you have not the remotest conception as to what true art really is, you have not seen nor read anything, you know. You have never been to a real theatre. You must go to a real theatre and then you will get an idea of what art really is. To let off a squib and to blow up a ship, that's not art!"

"Oh, really!" cried Ewald Knapp; "and if you talk rubbish, that no one can make head or tail of, for an hour, that's art, eh?"

"Oh! you're a duffer!" retorted Asmus; but at the very next opportunity they all of them went with one accord, and feeling very excited, to a real theatre, to the new Municipal Theatre in Altenberg.

They stood for hours in the crowd outside the door leading to the cheap seats, just as the seven-year-old Asmus had once waited in Hamburg outside the big, gloomy-looking door on the other side of which lay the country of Princess Snow-White and the kingdom of the Seven Dwarfs. They waited and perspired and pressed forward, and listened to the talk of the waiting crowd.

"I saw a lovely play a short while back," said a

fat woman, who was almost suffocating Asmus. "What was it called now? *King*—Yes, that's it. *King Lear*, by Shakespeare. Have you seen it?"

"No," answered a young man. "I've seen *Countess Leah*, that's rippin'."

"No, I ain't seen that," went on the fat woman. "And then I saw a play at Barnay's benefit—what was it called now?—it had such a funny name—they tooted on a kind of horn—"

"*Uriel Acosta*," said Asmus very shyly.

"Right you are, my lad, that's what it was. That was too sweet, only so awfully sad."

"I can't abide them sad things; I've tragedies enough in my own life," said a woman with a bright-coloured handkerchief on her head.

"But they're playing a tragedy to-day. *Faust's* a tragedy."

"You don't mean that! An' I thought it was an opera."

"Well, you see," came from the other side, "the whole of *Othello* is a very poor sort of thing." That was said by a pale Sixth-form boy with spectacles. "You don't come across such a villain as Iago anywhere. And then such snow-white innocence as Desdemona's. Just think it over: The man is a famous general in the service of Venice, and he lets a lieutenant stuff him full of lies, and takes in everything—it's so ridiculously improbable."

"Yes, yes," nodded respectfully an artisan in clean attire, who appeared highly delighted that a young man of so much learning should do him the honour of conversing with him. "What do you think of *Nathan der Weise*?" he asked anxiously and reverentially.

The Sixth-form boy shrugged his shoulders, and said, with a certain amount of indulgence:—

"Oh! a poem with a purpose. Have you seen Possart in it?"

"No."

"You should then. It's worth while."

Between whiles you would hear some one sucking a sweet, or another one was to be seen eating bread-and-cheese or taking a shamefaced pull at a spirit-flask. In the thick of the crowd one man, while people were pushing and shoving him about, squeezing him and treading on his toes, was absorbed in a cheap edition of *Faust*.

Up in the gallery, which bore a good deal of resemblance to a rack in a stable, it was as hot as in a Roman bath, but though the perspiration ran off Asmus's forehead in streams, he clapped at the end of every scene like a hired claqueur, and made Diepenbrock and Knapp clap as well; for everything seemed to him so beautiful, so very beautiful. He thought of the Sixth-form boy, and of all the people who found fault in some way or other with these glorious things; what fearfully clever people they must be! He could not help it, but he himself thought that everything that went on down there was indescribably beautiful.

Next to him sat a man like the driver of a brewer's dray. He said, when the scene in the witches' kitchen had come to an end: "A pretty, pretty piece. So true to life!" Even Ewald Knapp was delighted. The ride on the wine-barrel, the table from which they were able to draw wine, and the witches' kitchen convinced him that *Faust* was not so bad after all, and he no longer opposed this "stunning play's" being included in the repertoire. The first part of the tragedy was carefully prepared—but the censor interfered before the first perform-

ance took place. On the day of the first performance Diepenbrock had the ill-luck to fall out with his mother because he gave all his time and thoughts to *Faust*, and was not available for anything else. Asmus and Ewald happened to come in just as his mother was giving him a thrashing, and Asmus realised vividly, and with a sense of gratitude, that Rebekka Semper, even when she did use the broom-handle, was really a lamb in comparison. In her righteous anger Frau Diepenbrock interdicted not only the performance of *Faust*, but all other theatrical performances, and she was at no pains to hide the fact that she did not set the slightest value on the presence of Messrs. Semper and Knapp. Very sad and cast down, the Technical Director and the Art Director slunk away.

But Asmus was intensely sorry for his friend Diepenbrock. And when he was alone he thought: "You must comfort him, you must say something very nice to him to console him, so that he may forget his trouble." And then it suddenly seemed to him that that sort of thing could only be said in verse. Yes, only a poem could give consolation at a time of such deep grief. And, marvellous to relate, verses came to him of their own accord, melancholy verses which made him shed tears himself, and in an hour he had composed twenty lines. He wrote them down, and made up his mind to put the piece of paper into Diepenbrock's pocket the next morning on the sly, and then to run away quickly. But, sad to say, the next day Diepenbrock was quite cheerful again, and then Asmus felt ashamed to give it to him. He tore it up into a thousand little bits, and strewed them to the four winds of heaven. That was Asmus Semper's first poem.

CHAPTER XXXV

ABOUT DARK NIGHTS AND PALE MOONLIGHT.

IF his father had not been so ill, Diepenbrock's theatre would no doubt have dragged Asmus back into the warm pink-and-gold land of idleness. There was only one thing now that could make Ludwig Semper smile, and that was if Asmus, when he came home from school, was able to tell him of some fresh success he had achieved there, if he had been the only one in Herr Cremer's class who had been able to solve a geometrical problem, or if Herr Bendemann, —that Herr Bendemann with the steadfast, grey eyes, who looked as if his forebears had been Prussian officials for twenty generations, and who had once cross-examined Asmus so minutely with regard to his people,—if that Herr Bendemann of the drooping moustache had said, "Asmus Semper has written the best composition." And whenever anything of this kind occurred, Asmus took care to tell his father, because he knew it would make him smile however much he was suffering. But Ludwig Semper was ill and incapable of working for such an unreasonably long time that at last his sick-club refused to aid him any more, and then came a time of misery for the Sempers, longer and more severe than any previous one. Times were bad again, and what they were able to earn without Ludwig Semper's

assistance was only sufficient for half a week at the most. The stems which were stripped off the tobacco-leaves were the perquisites of the employes who worked in their own homes, and as soon as a little heap of them had been got together Asmus would stuff them into a sack and carry them to a factory where stems were made into pipe-tobacco. And then he would be told more often than not: "We have more than we require, we cannot take yours." Then Asmus would say quite openly: "Oh! please do buy them; we've no more money left." Then the employes would consult together as to whether they would risk it, in spite of what their master had said, and they would buy them of him, because they were so sorry for him, and he would return to his parents looking as pleased as Punch because he was taking them back three or four groschens. For some little time the Sempers managed to hold out, though terribly worried and anxious, but as Ludwig Semper got no better, and the work was not always as perfectly done as it ought to have been, the manufacturer took it away from him and gave it to some one else. The shop was closed; the Semperian Academy of Science and Art was broken up for good and all.

True, Johannes and Alfred earned a living out of the house, and Asmus found a little work now and again at a public-house, where they set him to peel potatoes or to set up quoits; but that did not go very far towards providing seven people with board and lodging. With a very anxious look in her eyes Rebekka Semper used to glance at the new bailiff who had come to the place, and who had given them a warning with regard to the taxes in arrear. And he certainly looked very formidable—long, lean, stiff as

a gun-barrel, with bushy grey eyebrows, a bushy grey moustache, and eyes that looked as if they could pierce through a whole squadron. He *had* been a serjeant-major for a considerable time. "He's a thorough Prussian," said Rebekka; "he looks as if it would give him pleasure to take a man's last shirt away from him." She did not like the Prussians, and would have preferred to have remained under Danish rule. You just paid them the schilling poll-tax and then had no further bother with them.

But there was some one who was more important than the bailiff, and that was the fat breadman, who always looked as if he were up to some trick or other. He wanted his money. When Ludwig begged him to wait because he had none just then the man struck a blow at the Sempers' weakest and most sensitive spot. He pointed to Johannes's guitar, which was hanging on the wall, and said with a sneer: "Oh, really! You've money enough for stupid things like that, anyhow."

Then Ludwig Semper rose to a height Asmus had never seen him attain before. He got up, pointed to the door, and cried:—

"Get out of here as fast as you can!"

"Oh, really! we're proud, too, are we now! Just you wait a bit—you'll hear from me," the dun shouted back; but by the time he had finished he was in the street, for he did not feel very comfortable under the old man's glance.

Asmus had been a witness of this scene, and it seemed to him that they were now on the direct road to destruction and death.

And after the breadman, came a man who was harder still, and that man was Winter. Alas! he did not call as kindly as he had done that time at

the Holstenloch, when the lanes and the bushes and the sun had whispered: "Come along, do come along!" For now Asmus had no shoes, and no overcoat and no gloves, and the winter was more severe this time than during the war year. It is intensely miserable to be cold; it affects your soul as well as your body. It is the most trying form of misery; the man who is chilled to the bone while the snow is soaking through his socks, and the east wind piercing to his armpits, loses all hope, all faith, even the power to wish; his one desire is to lie down by the side of the road and die. He is the most God-forsaken of all miserable beings on this earth. Even the air, man's greatest friend, has become his enemy; and the sun mocks at him, for the more brightly it shines the sharper becomes the frost. It was a Christmas morning again, when, with a basket on his arm and a milk-jug in his frozen hands, Asmus was returning home with a few necessities. As a boy of fourteen he was bitterly ashamed of crying, but he could not help it; one tear after the other rolled down his cheeks. Then he saw a broad-shouldered artisan coming towards him with both his hands in his trouser pockets. The lucky fellow! And he laughed all over his face when he caught sight of the boy, and called out:—

"Well, my lad, the sun gives a little more warmth to-day, doesn't it?"

Then Asmus, who loved fun and laughter with his whole heart, could not contain himself any longer. The tears streamed from his eyes, and, really glad to give vent to his feelings, he wept passionately.

Yes! he was no longer the merry, hot-headed

boy of former days; during this grey time of trouble a strange spirit had taken possession of him. His schoolfellows had lent him *'Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, in which we are told of a little girl, an angel in the form of a child, Evelina St. Clair, too fragile, beautiful, and good for this earth, who like a cloud that has descended from the sky soars up again to her own place, and is absorbed by the light of Heaven. The stupefying tropical sentimentality of the tale completely overpowered the boy's saddened spirit, and he made up his mind to be as pious, as gentle, and as good as that child so beloved of God; he, the irritable little termagant who had rushed at Klaus Rampuhn with clenched fists like a swallow against a church-tower—he wished to become like the little angel Evelina. If his mother scolded him, or even struck him, he would not set her at defiance or contradict her any more, he would bear and forbear, would not grumble nor show any evil feelings either at home or at school, he would be as gentle, good, and pious, as it was possible to be, and would love every one. He hoped that in consequence he would become as beautiful as Eva, and would die before long. He was glad of his suffering, because it was bringing him nearer to the goal he was longing so to reach, he even ate and drank less in order to hasten his dissolution.

But moods of this description flourish better in the warm, moist climate of wealth and comfort than in the inclement atmosphere of poverty and want. Brutal, naked realities forced themselves impertinently into the place of these seraphic dreams, and shouldered them out. First of 'all, came the fierce-looking bailiff to put up the notice of the execution. And

then a most unexpected and extraordinary thing happened. When Rebekka Semper told this thorough Prussian of her trouble, she discovered that the man with eyes that looked as if they could pierce through a whole squadron had a very gentle voice.

“Oh, that’s the state of things, is it — then perhaps it will be possible to arrange matters some other way. Don’t you worry, my dear woman—I’ll manage so that matters—that no harm comes to you. Good day! Now don’t you worry any more.”

And he went away and paid the amount the Sempers owed for taxes out of his own pocket.

When Asmus heard about it, his heart swelled so that it filled the whole of his chest, and he made up his mind that he would write a poem about the bailiff. That—that was something that could only be said in verse.

But the execution was put in all the same; for the breadman had taken out a summons. Ludwig Semper had begged that the cart might come late in the afternoon, and his request was granted; and then the sofa, the mirror, the much-loved piano, everything that was not absolutely indispensable, disappeared for ever into the darkness of misery. Things happened just as in that picture in the *Gartenlaube*: Rebekka cried, and Ludwig stood in the desolate workroom, his hands resting heavily on the table, gasping for breath and staring into vacancy. The first time the Sempers had been sold up little Asmus had almost enjoyed it, because there had been so much room in the house and it was such a change. Now he stood there and looked at the innocent myrmidons of the law as if they were his deadly enemies, and sorrow, despair, hatred, rage, and pity for his parents struggled for the

mastery in his heart. Henceforth, whenever Herr Cremer gave utterance to the words State and Government his heart rose up like a festive horse in battle. For the State was his enemy, the Government was his enemy, the King was his enemy. He was too young to take any other view of the matter, and he was Rebekka's son. He thought of his ideal, Eva St. Clair, and said to himself: "I cannot—I really cannot manage it."

And yet even during this dark time the moon was in the sky and was giving a pale, consoling light. Asmus took a violent fancy to the small two-year-old son of a neighbour. This was a very remarkable thing about him, that child as he was himself in every respect, he loved children beyond everything, loved them as a grown-up person loves them. The sweet delicacy, cheeriness, and charm of children seemed to him the most beautiful thing in the whole of earth's garden. In those olden days in the *Düstere lange Balken* he had loved Reinhold with an idolatrous love—he was now a good-looking, intelligent schoolboy; later on he had been quite silly about Adalbert—he, too, went to school now, and was an engineer into the bargain; and now that Rebekka had no more children after the thirteenth, a kind fate had given him a new brother in this little Rodrigo,—the child was named Rodrigo because the father, a joiner and a tippler, had once been in South America,—and Asmus loved him as if he had been his own brother or his own little son. He would lie for hours on the floor looking at him, and fancied he could hear all that was passing in the little fair head and in the warm little heart; he talked to him and played with him in his own language, stroked his curls, kissed him on the mouth, and then looked into his

clear, gold-coloured eyes. And the child never tired of his big playfellow, in fact even when his mother was holding him he would very often stretch out his little arms towards Asmus's neck, and then Asmus felt as proud as if he had conquered the Russian Empire. His feelings towards this child were those of a father. One evening the little fellow's mother ran into the Sempers pale with fright: ought she not to send for the doctor, she panted; her husband had the delirium again and kept seeing rats and mice. They sent Reiphold to fetch the doctor, but Asmus sneaked off at once up the staircase to the very top storey. His heart beating violently, he stood outside the door of the flat and listened. The sick man came out, apparently quite quiet, and said:—

"I say, Asmus, my lad, just fetch me two groschens' worth of brandy."

"All right," said Asmus, pale and trembling; "but I haven't a bottle."

"Oh, of course, my lad. I'll fetch you one;" and the madman disappeared into the kitchen. Asmus rushed into the room like a gust of wind, seized hold of Rodrige, who was sitting on the floor, and scudded down the staircase. He kept the child with him all the evening, and took him to bed with him. It was hours before he could get to sleep he was so excited, and had to keep on looking at the dear little sleeping child who was so blissfully unconscious of the sadness of his lot.

Soon after that a darker time than ever before set in for the Sempers.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TELLS OF LEONHARD'S LAST FAREWELL, OF A TRYING
SULTRY TIME, AND OF A SOARING BLISSFUL ONE.

ONE January day a man appeared at the Sempers who was a perfect stranger to them. He asked if Herr Semper lived there, and when he was answered in the affirmative he said :

"My name is Groth—your son Leonhard has been living in my house."

"Oh, indeed ? and——?" asked Ludwig Semper and Rebekka both at the same time and very anxiously ; for the man seemed very embarrassed.

"He—is very ill—he will probably——"

"Is he dead?" screeched Rebekka.

"Yes, yes!" said the man quickly, as if glad to be rid of his burden.

Ludwig Semper put his arm round his wife and led her to a chair. The man told them that the cause of Leonhard's death was heart failure. The doctor whom they had called in—a man addicted to drink himself, and who had an impediment in his speech—had said :

"He has been drinking too much for his heart. I warned him about it the other day at Sternfeld's."

Sternfeld's was one of the lowest public-houses in Oldensund, and was only frequented by most disreputable people. Leonhard had sunk as low as that, then !

The Semper family set off at once to see the dead boy. He was lying on a shabby, ragged old sofa; his features were quite composed, and wore a peaceful expression, and he had not lost his good looks. Rebekka knelt beside him, stroked him and kissed him, and gave loud expression to her sorrow.

"Don't cry any more," said Ludwig, as he endeavoured to lift her up. "Who can tell; it is probably the best thing that could happen to him."

"Oh! but he's my child, he's my child whatever he has done!" cried Rebekka, throwing herself over the dead body.

On the table was a volume of Eichendorff's poems. Leonhard had been reading it when death overtook him. And on a little bookshelf was a whole row of Brockhaus's *Encyclopædia* in numbers.

"He used to take that in," said his landlord, "and he was always studying it. He would often be quite steady for months at a time, and wouldn't go outside the door; and then he studied the whole time. And then all of a sudden he would be seized with a fit of dissipation."

"Drinking had nothing to do with it either," said Rebekka, "he always had something wrong with his heart."

Ludwig did not contradict her.

Who was to pay for the funeral? The Sempers could not; Leonhard had to be buried by the parish.

Moldenhuber stood beside the grave, his underlip projecting more than usual as he looked into it. Life had put a great distance between the two friends.

Alaus had not been able to cry. He felt like his father: "Who knows what dreadful things might have happened to him. It is better so."

But when they began to lower the coffin he kept

on calling out, in a tone of voice that grew more and more full of alarm: "No! no! no! no!" until the man for whom Leonhard had last worked led him aside and reasoned with him.

On the way home the same man said: "Four days ago he gave us such a fine song at the shop."

"Did he?" said Asmus. "What did he sing?"

"Oh, something from *Tannhäuser*. That about where Tannhäuser comes back from Rome—

"And as this barren staff I hold
Ne'er will put forth flower or leaf,
Thus shalt thou never more behold
Salvation or thy sin's relief."

And then Asmus recalled Leonhard leaving his home for the first time when they were living in the Düstere lange Balken, his appearing in a top-hat and white waistcoat, and with a watch that he held to Asmus's ear when they were at the Holstenloch, and then his kneeling down by his mother in front of the linen chest and shedding tears when they were living in the Brunnenstrasse—and remembered that now he was lying in his grave with all that black earth on the top of him. And the sadness of life's vicissitudes melted the hardness of his heart as a warm wind melts the ice. A feeling of intense sorrow came over him, and he began to shed hot, silent tears.

One of the great misfortunes of the poor is that the struggle for existence forbids even the painful joy of giving themselves up to grieving for the loss of their loved ones. Their grief is sullied by worry with regard to the ordinary necessities of life, and has even to be pushed on one side as a luxury that cannot be afforded—a luxury to which beggars have no right. And with the Sempers things got at last

to such a pass that—quite overwhelmed with shame—they were obliged to go to a public distribution centre to fetch tickets which at another place they were able to exchange for soup. It was just at this time, too, that Asmus had to make up his mind as to what he was to be.

What was he to be? A poet or sculptor, as was once his proud thought? Ha! ha-ha-ha-haa! Times had changed indeed! A sailor? He must stay at home and help to support his parents. Once upon a time he had said: "If I could only be a teacher!" All those things were utter foolishness now! A short time back he had stood in front of the window of a hat-factory and had looked at the people at work.

It seemed to be quite interesting—suppose he were to make up his mind to be a hatter? He would rather make fireworks, he must confess. In the loft, in that big basket of his mother's, he had come across a book about fireworks by a man called Ruggeri. For a whole fortnight he had walked along surrounded by a never-ending shower of sparks and flames; in his dreams and in his waking hours he had made squibs and rockets, suns and stars, and in the middle of the Scripture lesson fiery palm-trees, golden chandeliers, and silver cascades had shot up in his soul and had wrapped his poverty-stricken existence in light and splendour. Or should he be a joiner? Of all artisans he had always liked joiners best. There was something creative about their work, that was why it appealed to him so. But these were only foolish imaginings! Vain dreams! All those things cost money, of his parents would have to support him for years. He must earn money, and at once, and the more the better. Consequently, he must stick to

tobacco. He had acquired a certain amount of skill in cigar-making; in another three months he would be able to make them quite well by himself, and he would be paid wages at once, higher ones than as an apprentice in any other trade. In six months' time he would be able to have three, four, or even five talers rattling in his pocket every week—and that would be jolly, there was no doubt of that! He would give most of it to his parents, but he would keep enough for himself to enable him to enjoy all the pleasures of the world: theatres, beer, dancing, and—all the pleasures! There must be pleasures in the world outside—wonderful pleasures—he did not know what they were—but strangely seductive, intense pleasures. If he were to be a cigar-maker and were to earn all that money straight off, he would be independent, would be his own master, would be able to do what he liked—in three months' time! And then he would be able to learn what the world was like. His brother Leonhard's nature was at work in him.

But then, again, the sight of a book made his heart ache with a bitter sadness. He had longed to be a great and clever man, he had wanted to learn everything, everything—and now this was all at an end. But no, it should not be, he *would* learn, would go on learning more and more, whatever his calling had to be; and at nine o'clock that evening he sat down with Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education* in front of him; but as he did not understand them he thought himself hopelessly stupid, and as he was growing fast, and food and sleep were more important to him at that time than anything else, in ten minutes his head dropped on to his book and he fell asleep. When his father woke him by shaking him gently, he

started up, and slunk away with hanging head, overcome with shame, and as he lay in bed the sense of his weakness and stupidity filled him with silent rage. It was a sultry, oppressive time, and yet a soaring, happy time.

For at rare intervals, more especially on Sunday mornings, his breast would expand, and he would be full of a cheerful longing and ready to soar to unknown heights. He seemed to have wings inside which were longing to unfold themselves, and yet not able to, wings that stretched themselves out farther and farther, so far that there was not nearly enough room for them in his breast, and he was blissfully happy but much cramped. He seemed to hear voices in the air crying out: "You are not destined to stay down below there.—Another lot has been cast for you—you will fly some time or other." He seemed to scent a purer, more rarefied atmosphere. After that he would saunter about idly, humming and singing, thinking of nothing, longing for nothing, simply happy; and why he, who a minute or so before had been so sad and oppressed, was so happy now he could have explained to none. Then again, at night, he would have weird, oppressive dreams; would see himself in vast, dreary halls, the walls of which would sink down slowly on to his chest, and then he would scream aloud, would jump out of bed and rush about the house moaning, until his mother led him back to bed and comforted him. Then he would fall asleep again, and would perhaps see himself reclining on the green and silver islands which rise up with the fall of Elbe's breathing bosom, and it seemed to him as if all the hurrying waters ran away from his heart, all the water, quite away from his heart, and by degrees a lighter, pleasanter feeling would steal over him,

and, lo and behold ! by his side would be sitting the little Greek Queen, stroking his forehead and smiling at him with a sweet light in her sad eyes. After he had dreamt about her he would go about quite quietly and solemnly for days.

The Confirmation was getting nearer and nearer. During the last term, the boys who were leaving had, in addition to the seven and a half hours of Scripture with Herr Cremer, two lessons a week from the Vicar. Herr Cremer talked to the catechumens with an increasingly solemn, melancholy seriousness. He did not like parting with the boys, and the boys did not like parting with him. And he gave each of them an accolade ; that was an old, time-honoured custom. This accolade took the form of a perceptible box on the ear, which at a suitable opportunity Herr Cremer gave to every boy who was about to be confirmed. That might be counted on as few things in this world can be counted on, and any boy who failed to get one would have felt very much neglected. For it was the sign-manual that you were too old for school and were to some extent a young man :—

“Zuo gotes unde Marien êr,
disen slac unde keinen mâr”—

and, besides, each one felt that in this blow the old man summed up all the care and love, all the genial teaching and admonitions that he had bestowed upon them in the years that could never return, and gave them to him again symbolically as a parting gift to take with him on life's journey. And every one of them got that box on the ear, even that perfect boy Julius Tipp.

During the whole of the last year Herr Bendemann had been giving lessons in Herr Cremer's class. And

in the course of one of the last lessons Herr Bende-
mann had stared so long and so piercingly at Asmus
—who was still very short for his age—with his
clear, kind eyes, that any one might have thought
that he wished to bore through Asmus Semper and
get to the other side of him. And at last he had
asked :

“What do you want to be, Asmus?”

“I don't know,” Asmus had replied.

Then Herr Bende-
mann had looked at him once
more, and for nearly as long, and then he had
slowly withdrawn his gaze and had taken his de-
parture.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A PERFECTLY INCREDIBLE YET TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE
DOINGS OF MESSRS. BENDEMANN AND LUDWIG
SEMPER.

ABOUT this time, Ludwig Semper was within an ace of taking up another trade. It was reported that the post of school-attendant at the Oldensund School was vacant.

"Go and see!" said Rebekka.

"Oh! what's the use of my going there?" said Ludwig.

But he went all the same, for poverty and want had made him enterprising. He received the assurance, too, that "they had made a note of his name," and then a shoemaker who went to church every Sunday, and believed everything he was required to, was appointed. And the incongruity was avoided of the school-attendant's being a better educated man than the headmaster. Then Ludwig Semper applied for the post of messenger to a sick-club. But they wanted a young man, strong enough to climb up all the stairs to the rooms of the poor, and for Ludwig Semper one flight of stairs was as much as the Blocksberg would be for ordinary people. And then, at last, he got work again as a cigar-maker; a fortnight before Asmus's confirmation he got work, and such good work that Rebekka was able

to buy a hat for her son for two marks, and a black frock-coat at a second-hand shop for four marks. She felt very solemn about it all, and she, who always looked upon priests as her deadly enemies and detested church, actually went with her son to the confirmation, to confession, and to the Lord's Supper, and was quite quiet, because she felt so solemn, and cried because she felt so pious. But Asmus,—when the minister told the children to say the "Belief" and then to say all together: "Yes, certainly we believe it,"—Asmus was silent. He was perfectly well aware that his silence did not matter in the least, that the mere fact of his taking part in the ceremony was a confession of faith; but on this most serious day and in this most sacred place he felt so solemn that he could not utter a lie. He felt so solemn in fact that his heart beat more gently during the whole of that day; the thought kept on recurring that he was standing at a great turning-point in his life, that his fate would now be decided once for all; and, between whiles, he would put his hand into the pocket in the tail of his coat; for the fact that he was able to pull his pocket-handkerchief out of his coat-pocket from behind like his father and all the other grown-ups filled him with pride and delight.

But the question of what he was to be did not get settled. Ludwig Semper put off the decision from week to week, and Asmus for the whole of the day instead of for half, prepared the leaves, made the wrappers, and began learning how to make cigars. He only went to school now on certain days. Old Herr Rösing had done him the honour of requesting him to replace the old, torn, dirty writing copies by new ones, and Asmus was de-

lighted to do it; it was quite a different sort of thing from stripping tobacco. Herr Rösing used to look at him with a feeling of great satisfaction, proud of having raised his pupil to the highest point of culture; for he could even paint Gothic and Latin copies with hatching and arabesques. And one day Asmus copied the following verses:—

“If all thy life were ordered
 As thou wouldst have it be,
 And God imposed no burden,
 No blessing took from thee,
 Ah, child, when Death's dark valley
 Thy falt'ring footsteps trod,
 Couldst thou forget Earth's pleasures?
 Couldst thou look up to God?”

Gently the bonds that bind thee
 Are loosening one by one,
 Calmly the grave shall lead thee
 To Heaven—thy journey done.
 Fear vanquished! Hope triumphant!
 Ah! words we know so well;
 Can we repeat too often,
 The blessed tale they tell?”

“Oh yes!” thought Asmus, “it's a good thing when things are not so very flourishing. One doesn't mind dying so much.” Then, suddenly, he saw something long standing beside him, and when he glanced up it was Herr Bendemann. He was looking with those steadfast eyes of his at Asmus Semper's writing, and then he said:

“Should you like to make some use of your good handwriting?”

Then it seemed to Asmus as if some one else were speaking out of him, as if a stronger will than his snatched the words away from him and said: “I should like to be a schoolmaster”—and when Asmus

heard what that other person in him had said, he was frightened, and added quickly: "but my parents could not possibly manage it."

Then Herr Bendemann said these words:

"Talk it over with your parents. I will teach you for nothing."

At this moment Herr Bendemann, in his grey suit and with his red moustache, looked like the bright Archangel Gabriel, and Asmus stammered out:

"Yes—yes—I will—thank you—I will talk it over with my parents again—thank you. . . ."

If Herr Rösing had seen Asmus's work during the next hour he would have had serious doubts as to his pupil's perfection. The writing was a sight to behold, it wandered up and down in waves; for the writer's eyes were rarely on his pen but always somewhere else and his hand ran out over the edge of the paper—it wanted so to start off home. If only the clock would strike twelve—then how fast he would run home—no! he would go by leaps and bounds, he would fly. But when the time came at last, he walked along very slowly. His poverty weighed down upon his heart. His parents would never be able to manage it! He would have to study for several years, and during that time he would be able to earn nothing—afterwards, it is true, as a teacher he would get an enormous salary, and then there would be no more poverty and want at home; but until then?—no, they couldn't manage it!

And yet his heart throbbed and bounded when he said to his mother in the kitchen:

"Herr Bendemann will teach me for nothing. I should like to be a schoolmaster."

"Ah, lad," replied Rebekka, "how can you be a

teacher? As it is, we cannot sleep for worry! Your brothers are not schoolmasters!"

But it was an interesting event all the same, and she went with her son into the living-room, where Ludwig Semper was standing gasping for breath, his hands pressed hard on the table. And she told him what Herr Bendemann had said.

Then into Ludwig Semper's sad eyes came back a light which was wont to be there long, very long ago. It came nearer and nearer, and his eyes grew bigger and bigger, and clearer and clearer, and the light spread over his forehead, over his mouth, and over his silvery hair, and then he smiled, and no longer supported himself by the table but stood upright and at ease, and seized hold once more of the rudder of his life—seized hold of it with a smile, blindly, at a venture, and laid his hand upon his son's head as once before in the Holstenloch when he had got to the top of his class, and said: "All right, you shall be a schoolmaster."

Then Rebekka asked, but very softly and timidly:

"But how will you be able to manage it?"

"Don't worry about that," said Ludwig, "I shall find a way."

He did not reckon out how much it would cost; he did not consider the matter at all; it was not in his nature to worry about the future—but to do some good and great thing with a lofty recklessness, of that he was capable.

In Asmus's family and Asmus's home, parents and children only kissed each other as long as the children were small. Children as big as Asmus, particularly if they were boys, did not kiss their parents, and certainly not their father. They would have felt ashamed of doing so. Asmus would have loved to

have given one wild bound, to have flung his arms round his father's neck, and to have covered his mouth and cheeks and forehead and hair and beard with kisses. But oh! that stupid, silly, horrible shyness! All he did was to stand there and wriggle about and wring and squeeze his hands; and at last he said, with hot, glowing eyes and twitching mouth:

"I—I will work awfully, awfully hard——" and then he could not get out another word, and ran out of the room. ●

LAST CHAPTER

TREATS OF THE SEMPER'S GOOD FORTUNE, OF THE
GREEK QUEEN, AND OF MANY OTHER BLISSFUL
THINGS.

DURING the whole of the following year Asmus was soaring, soaring aloft, and hovering in a clear, bright sky.

To Herr Bendemann he went only once a week, and that for the purpose of studying the German language and literature. Herr Bendemann's room was an abode well befitting such a man. In it were four chairs, a table, and a cupboard; but it was suffused with the poetic atmosphere of a pure, serene life, of a life consecrated to duty. Immanuel Kant might have dwelt there, and to Asmus the room always seemed as pleasant and as good to live in as a clear conscience. Herr Bendemann allowed the boy to work by himself, and endeavoured to find out how much he ought to expect from him. He gave him six pages to study, then eight, then twelve, and last of all twenty. He believed Asmus had the whole week to do his task in, but in reality he had only half a day; during the rest of the time he was, of necessity, obliged to help with the cigars, and the evening he devoted to learning Latin and French. He never fell asleep now, his life had a rudder, wind in the sails, he was passing out of the

brook into the river, out of the river into the sea, out of the sea into immensity. He was sitting at the well-spring and was drinking, drinking, his one desire to drink it dry; his one desire to learn everything, everything that could be learnt; so that, after that, he might be happy. He no longer touched the earth with his feet, but flew along, and flying was very easy to him. He only needed to beat the air two or three times with his pinions and then, without any exertion, he was able to float along through the light for a long, long while.

He still found time for rambles, and his way took him past snug hedges, past ponds covered with green weeds, through peaceful villages; and by his side walked Schiller and Ossian—Aristotle and Goethe—Voltaire and Klopstock—Gottsched and Bodmer. He read everything that he came across, even Bodmer's *Noachiede* and Ramler's Odes. But what pleased him best was to go down through the gap, past the "Half Moon," to his beloved river Elbe, and to tell her with long, silent looks how happy he was. Then he would wander along by the side of the river, and would climb up the bank again by Martin's Mill, there where the evening shadows lay on a hedge-encircled meadow, full of flowering mallows; and there he would lie down with his book and gaze at the Elbe flowing along below him, broad and tranquil, just as it used to flow along when he was picking up the chips on Horsmann's Wharf. And, with silver sails, the hours of his past life came sailing along on the stream—landed, tripped up to the meadow, glided through the hedge, unwound silvery, rose-tinted veils, which floated away and vanished into the evening glow, danced past him, singing sad yet blissful strains, then disappeared again among the bushes as a song dies away amid the trees

in the far dim distance. The hours came when he sat and smoked with Dierich Mattens on the palings, when through the garret window his eyes roamed over the vast expanse of country "where the soft breezes blew from the heaven so blue," when he went that winter morning with Eliezer to court Rebekah; when Adolfine Moses informed him that war had been declared; when with hot, dry eyes he gazed fixedly at the flames of the burning house; when the bricklayer imitated the popping of a cork with his mouth; when Klaus Rampuhn pulled him down the pole in the gymnasium so that his head struck heavily upon the floor; when he sat upon the bare boards in his little white frock while his mother leant over the balusters and chatted with a neighbour. Interweaving, then intertwining in the most wonderful way, approaching and retiring in the gayest, most tantalising fashion, the hours danced the dreamy, tuneful measure.

Life was so beautiful that even the hours of suffering looked at him kindly; life was so sad that even the laughing eyes of the hours of bliss were overshadowed with pensive melancholy because everything passes away and is no more. He recalled the day, too, when he had acted "Dr. Krause" with Leonard's confirmation hat, and the day when he stood beside his brother's corpse; and the thought occurred to him: "If Leonard had had masters like yours, if he had been taken up by a master as you have been, if he had had a chance of learning—things would have been different with him—and all your brothers and sisters!" If fortune had been as kind to them—And in the midst of his great happiness he was suddenly overcome by a sense of sadness and anxiety.

During the whole of this happy time, in fact, Melancholy always walked by his side. For the

poems he composed, as he wandered along by the banks of the Elbe, his favourite metre was that of Sappho's Odes, because the last line reminded him of the evening breeze blowing over the flowers on a grave. He sang of the death of faithful friends who had never lived, of the faithlessness of lovers whom he had never seen—lovers who, though faithless, were without exception beautiful of form and of angelic natures. But he sang, too, of indignation at and revolt against tyranny, and against all attempts to subjugate the mind. All this he poured forth with heaving bosom to the storms of autumn as he strode through the sand on the banks of the Elbe, with head thrust forward and steps much too long for his height.

In childhood one saying had impressed itself upon his mind, the saying—"E pur si muove" (and yet it does move), and how could he refrain from making it the leading idea of a poem? Here it is—

E PUR SI MUOVE.

To Rome, the holy city, the Great Galileo came.
Before the High Tribunal was wrought the deed of shame.
They bade him lie—spurn science—hypocrisy embrace;
For he had read too clearly the laws that govern space.

To damp, pestiferous dungeons, they dragged him in their hate,
Blind bigotry triumphant—relentless—cruel as Fate.
His old and trembling body his youthful spirit quelled,
He yielded in his anguish; denied the truth he held.

Then back into the sunlight they brought him once again,
His noble brow revealing his struggle and his pain,
But when, on limbs cold-shivering, they fastened irons accurst,
He knew his heart was breaking—his foes had done their worst.

His hand upon the Bible, he swore at their behest:
"The ball of Earth beneath us immovable doth rest
And firm upon its axis unchangeable doth stay,
While the fiery ball above moves round it day by day."

He swore upon the Bible, then flashed his spirit forth,
 Stirred to his inmost being, he gnashed his teeth in wrath,
 Regardless of oppressors who still more cruel could prove,
 Through his clenched teeth he muttered :
 "I'm sure the earth does move."

'Mid slander, grief and trouble, in dreary exile long,
 The patient, mighty thinkers have suffered and been strong ;
 Like Galileo, victims of ignorance and hate,
 Their spirit lives undying, triumphant over Fate.

All ye who strive, take courage, for Truth can never die,
 To him who truly seeks her, she cannot lose deny,
 And though to death men drag you, the stake itself shall prove,
 The flames themselves bear witness—that yet the earth does move.

"That will do," thought Asmus, though when he was quite honest with himself, it is true, he had to confess that at times it had been a beastly job to find words to rhyme and to get the right number of syllables. Indirectly, through his mother, he found out that the poem had given his father intense pleasure. One day Johannes—rummaging about amongst his papers—had come across the poem and, speechless with delight, had shown it to his father.

Yes, Ludwig Semper was happy again, his eyes grew clear, he walked along at a more rapid rate; his wearisome complaint ceased to trouble him. It seemed as if the great decision to drag his son up from the abyss, and to transplant him into higher spheres, had rejuvenated his body as well as his soul, and had freed him from all his troubles and complaints. He laughed again, and even sang, and one day, when it was very evident that his son was making great progress, he raised his head from his work, looked straight into the brightest part of the lamp, and said aloud :

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
 Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune."

And then he threw one leg over the other, laughed to himself so that his shoulders shook, and went on making his cigars again.

At the end of the year, Asmus went up for the entrance examination for the Hamburg Training College,—not without trepidation and a sinking feeling at his heart. “Now,” he thought, “you will show every one how horribly ignorant you are.”

The first time he entered the room, the director snarled at him. He was unaware of the fact that that was the director’s way—always to snarl at first, and that—despite this peculiarity—he was really a splendid fellow. Amongst the examiners, too, was one with a very round, broad, red head, which appeared still broader on account of the little tufts of hair which stuck out in all directions. This man looked at Asmus as if he wished to say: “Any one who is not as learned as I am, I will eat up in five minutes.”

This most trying examination lasted eight days, and, when it came to an end, Asmus had passed.

The next day as he was setting off on his way home, in the highest of spirits, he was joined by a fellow-student, and on the other side of the fellow-student an acquaintance of the young man was walking—a slim girl of about seventeen years of age, with great brown eyes and a wealth of brown hair. She carried a portfolio, and was evidently a student at the Women’s Training College, which was close by. She held herself very erect and carried her head haughtily, yet the expression of her face was gentle, almost melancholy in fact. She did not talk much. When his friend turned off in a different direction, Asmus walked on alone with her for a little while. He seemed to himself to be more awkward and a

greater idiot than ever; he could not think of anything whatever to say. At last he blurted out:

"Have you far to go to your home?"

"Yes," she answered. "I have to get to Eimsbüttel."

"Do your parents live at Eimsbüttel?" he asked, for amongst the students at the Seminary were many whose parents lived at a distance.

"My parents are not alive," she answered.

"Oh dear!" he said involuntarily, and thought at the same time, "What a lubber you are, to be sure!" Then he noticed that she was in mourning. Her dress was so simple as to look almost poverty-stricken, but absolutely clean and tidy, and everything she wore was so becoming that it was impossible to doubt for an instant that she was a gentlewoman and very refined. Asmus wished very much to say something else, but everything that occurred to him seemed so tactless and foolish that he decided it was better to keep silence. At last he took off his hat all of a sudden, made a movement that was intended for a polite bow, and said: "Good-evening." She responded with a graceful bend of her head, and they went their different ways.

He had no idea that the little Greek Queen—the Queen of the Mainotti—had been walking by his side—the little girl who had sat in front of the inn between the railway embankments. She had no idea that he was the little boy who had given her the glass marble—the glass marble which she still kept—why she hardly knew—in her little workbox.

A week later, his class master, who looked like integrity and geometry personified, sent for Asmus Semper.

"You have been promoted to a higher class," he said.

Asmus grew pale. "But I have not learnt any English," he ejaculated.

"That does not matter. You will be able to catch up the others in a month. They do not wish your time to be wasted. They have granted you a scholarship."

How very wonderful and strange to be sure—the faces of all the people Asmus met on his way home seemed absolutely beautiful! And when he suddenly found himself in Oldensund—However had he got to Oldensund? He had not walked there, of that he felt certain! He had not touched the ground! His feet had run home of their own accord, as a horse that has lost its rider finds its way back alone to its stable. His head had been floating far above his feet, on heaving, gleaming waters, and on these waters the heads of all the people he had met had been swimming, too, like water-lilies, with sweet laughing faces, while those close to him looked as if they were far away, and those at a distance as if he could catch hold of them.

"I have been promoted, and they have given me a scholarship," rang in jubilant tones through the Sempers' house, and Asmus appeared. Frau Rebekka had to be told three times before she could take it in and credit it.

But Ludwig gazed at his son as though he had made his acquaintance for the first time that day. Then, as was his wont, he put his hand upon the boy's head, and rubbed it for such a long time and with such gleeful zest that every single hair seemed to have a sting in it. Asmus, however, did not utter

a sound, did not move an eyelash, and a shiver ran down his back. At that moment, they were one—the father and son—and together they looked down upon a new land. Then Ludwig Semper suddenly threw out both his arms, in a way no one had ever seen him do before, and shouted out:

“The Sempers are rising again. Yes! the Sempers are rising again!”

THE END

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